



**HUMAN RIGHTS,  
DEMOCRACY  
AND THE RULE OF LAW**

**COUNCIL OF EUROPE**



**CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE**

**DROITS DE L'HOMME,  
DÉMOCRATIE  
ET ÉTAT DE DROIT**

# Plurilingual and intercultural education: what, why and how?

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Some preliminary considerations

# Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)1

- The concept of ***plurilingual and intercultural education***
  - has implications for the whole of educational culture
  - poses major challenges to all educational agents and stakeholders
- “The full implementation of the measures proposed is the work of many years and entails shifts not only in education policies and practices but in societal attitudes to linguistic and cultural diversity” (§ 5.a.iii)
- On the other hand, the Council of Europe has long been committed to
  - plurilingualism and plurilingual approaches to (language) education
  - the development of intercultural awareness and intercultural competences
  - education for democratic citizenship
- To this extent, there is nothing new in the Recommendation
  - Everything it proposes can be found in existing Council of Europe policy documents and instruments and is supported by a wide range of ECML projects
  - Its purpose is to use the holistic concept of ***plurilingual and intercultural education*** to remind member states of long-established aspirations and give those aspirations new impetus

# Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)1

- Paragraph 1.a of the Recommendation states that the measures set out in the appendix should be implemented “taking due account of national, regional and/or local circumstances, and in conformity with constitutional provisions”
  - Implementation should be context-sensitive
  - Plurilingual and intercultural education comes in many different shapes and sizes
- While recognizing that full implementation of the measures is the work of many years (§ 5.a.iii), the Recommendation also states: “Much can nevertheless be achieved in the meantime by adjusting policy and practice at the level of the educational institution and the classroom and by drawing on existing Council of Europe resources” (§ 5.a.iv)
- This paradox reminds us that educational progress is most efficient when
  - the evolution of policy is informed by successful practice
  - general principles are tested against the realities of lived educational experience
  - the daily realities of school and classroom, college and lecture hall/seminar room, engage critically with the principles that shape policy

## How I shall answer the three questions in my title

1. What is plurilingual and intercultural education?
  - The definition provided by the Recommendation
2. Why should we promote plurilingual and intercultural education?
  - The underlying principles set out in the Recommendation
3. How do we develop and implement plurilingual and intercultural education?
  - An example from Ireland: what has already been possible in one educational context

What is plurilingual and intercultural education?

# Recommendation CM/R(2022)1: definition

Setting out to foster the development of integrated linguistic repertoires in which languages interrelate and interact, **[*plurilingual and intercultural education*]** takes account of and seeks to bring into interaction with one another:

- i. the languages and cultures that learners bring with them, including sign, minority and migrant languages and cultures;
- ii. the languages of schooling, which vary in genre and terminology according to the different subjects taught and differ in significant ways from the language of informal everyday communication;
- iii. regional, minority and other languages and cultures that are part of the curriculum;
- iv. foreign languages (modern and classical);
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- CEFR 1.3 defines plurilingualism as “a communicative competence to which all knowledge and experience of language contributes and in which languages interrelate and interact” (Council of Europe 2001: 4)
- An integrated repertoire includes all the languages the individual uses, at whatever level of proficiency and however those languages have been learnt

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- The CEFR’s action-oriented approach to the definition of proficiency (2.1) views language users and learners as “social agents”: “members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances (Council of Europe 2001: 9)
- Learners of all ages are not “blank slates”: they already have a linguistic and cultural repertoire

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- In many countries, migrant learners already have plurilingual repertoires, but *plurilingual and intercultural education* is for everyone, and teachers of all subjects have a stake in it

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- *Plurilingual and intercultural education* creates awareness of languages and cultures in society at large

Why should we promote plurilingual and intercultural education?

# Recommendation CM/R(2022)1: seven underlying principles

## 4. Plurilingual and intercultural education

- i. is essential to education for democratic culture;
- ii. respects and values linguistic and cultural diversity;
- iii. promotes language awareness and language sensitivity across the curriculum;
- iv. encourages critical reflection on cultural diversity;
- v. helps to foster critical digital literacy and digital citizenship;
- vi. encourages learner autonomy and values the learner's voice;
- vii. supports the inclusion of disadvantaged and marginalized learners on an equal footing with other learners.

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- “Education prepares the individual to be an active participant in democratic society by promoting his or her personal development, combining social responsibility with growing self-awareness, self-confidence, independence of thought, and critical cultural and language awareness” (EM, § 4.i)

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- The European Cultural Convention (1954) aims to “achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose, among others, of safeguarding and realizing the ideals and principles which are their common heritage”
- The Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue (2008) defines integration as a two-way process that requires an active response on the part of majority as well as minority communities
- Plurilingual and intercultural education supports this political agenda by respecting and valuing linguistic and cultural diversity

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- “[W]hen the languages available to learners, together with whatever cultural experiences are attached to them, are drawn into the educational process, all learners are helped to develop critical language awareness and intercultural competence” (EM, § 4.ii)
- With the development of integrated plurilingual repertoires in mind, “all teachers are responsible for helping their learners to understand and master the academic language ... specific to their subject” (EM, § 4.iii–iv)

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- “As an increasingly important part of everyday linguistic reality, communication via digital media should play a central role in plurilingual and intercultural education for democratic culture. Digital citizenship and engagement involve a wide range of activities, from creating, consuming, sharing, playing and socializing, to investigating, communicating, learning and working” (EM, § 4.v)

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- The Council of Europe first introduced the concept of learner autonomy to language education (Holec 1979): autonomisation of learners seen as an essential dimension of democratic education
- “Giving pupils and students a voice in the educational process is a way of developing their capacity for autonomous learning and critical thinking and thus preparing them for lifelong learning and active participation in the democratic process” (EM, § 4.vi)
- “Making space for pupils’ and students’ voice means requiring them to share responsibility for the teaching/learning process and involving them in the organization of extracurricular activities” (EM, § 4.vi)

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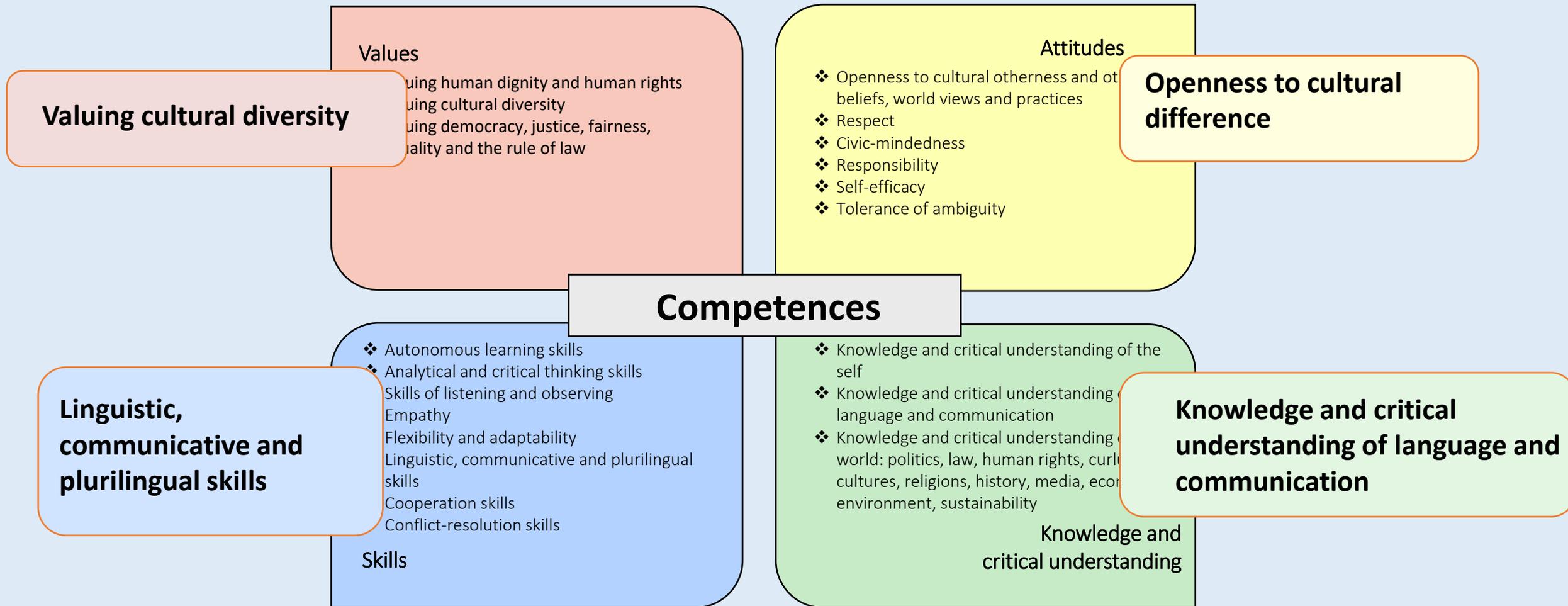
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- “Because it values and draws on the linguistic and cultural resources of all pupils and students, plurilingual and intercultural education supports the full inclusion of those from disadvantaged and marginalized situations” (EM, § 4.vii)

# Plurilingual and intercultural education helps to develop the competences needed for democratic citizenship



How do we develop and implement plurilingual and intercultural education?

An example from Ireland  
(with thanks to Déirdre Kirwan)

# Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní), Blanchardstown, 2014/2015

320 pupils from 4½+  
to 12½+ years

Most had little or no  
English when they  
started school



80% from immigrant  
families

51 home languages,  
most of them  
unknown to teachers

Afrikaans, Amharic, Arabic, Bangla, Benin, Bosnian, Cantonese, Cebuano, Dari, Estonian, Farsi, Foula, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Igbo, Ilonggo, Indonesian, Isoko, Itsekiri, Italian, Kannada, Kinyarwanda, Konkani, Kurdish, Latvian, Lingala, Lithuanian, Malay, Malayalam, Mandarin, Marathi, Moldovan, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Shona, Slovakian, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Tamil, Ukrainian, Urdu, Vietnamese, Visayan, Xhosa, Yoruba

# The Irish context

## *Language*

- Irish the first and English the second official language
  - Irish an obligatory subject from the beginning to the end of schooling
  - Irish the first/home/preferred language of a small minority of the population

## *Demographics*

- Steady increase in immigration since the 1990s
- Population grew by 31% between 1996 and 2016
- Ireland now a linguistically and culturally diverse society

## *Eight years of primary schooling*

- Two preparatory years: Junior and Senior Infants (= pre-school in other countries)
- Six primary grades (Classes)

## *Child-centred curriculum*

- Pupils should realize their full potential as unique individuals (Government of Ireland, 1999: 7)
- “... the child’s existing knowledge and experience form the basis for learning” (ibid.: 8)
- “... the child is an active agent in his or her learning” (ibid.: 8)
- Emphasizes the importance of the life of the home (ibid.: 24)

# Scoil Bhríde's version of the plurilingual approach in 2015

## Basic pedagogical principles

1. Plurilingual pupils will learn most effectively if they are encouraged to use all the languages at their disposal whenever they want to and for whatever purposes seem to them appropriate
2. Even very young children can be trusted to know how to use their home language as a tool of learning
3. Teaching and learning proceed via exploratory dialogue: pupils share the initiative in classroom discourse
4. Strong emphasis on development of literacy skills in English, Irish, French and home languages: involvement of immigrant parents in the development of their daughters' home language literacy

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- Principle 2 arises from the fact that the pupil's home language is her principal cognitive tool, the medium of her discursive thinking and her consciousness
- These functions of the pupil's home language explain why it is cruel, misguided and vain to forbid her to use that language at school

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- Principle 3 coincides with the expectations of the Primary School curriculum, though it does not shape teaching in all Irish primary schools
- Clearly, if pupils are to use their home language in the classroom, they must be allowed to share control of classroom discourse
- The combination of home language use and discourse control is expected to promote pupils' self-confidence and self-efficacy

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- Principle 4 complements Principle 3: reading and writing are in balance with listening and speaking; the development of literacy skills supports the development of oral skills and vice versa
- Scoil Bhríde's goal is to develop pupils' writing skills to the highest levels of age-appropriate proficiency in all the languages in their developing plurilingual repertoires

# How did it work in the classroom?

## Three functions of home languages:

- In reciprocal communication between pupils who have the same or a closely related home language
  - Play at the beginning of the school day in Junior Infants and in the yard at all levels of the school
  - Pair and group work in the classroom
- For non-reciprocal purposes of display: “This what we say in my language”
  - In the most junior classes learning to count, working with shapes and colours, and action games were multilingual activities
  - Use of home languages scaffolded the learning of English, Irish and curriculum content
- As a source of intuitive linguistic knowledge that individual pupils made available to the teacher and the rest of the class
  - Enrichment of curriculum content and consolidation of curriculum learning

## Language awareness

- Introduction of fractions in Third Class (8½+)
  - Teacher associated *fraction* with *fracture* and elicited synonyms (*break, split*) and words for *break* in other languages
  - Romanian pupil offered *rupt*, which pupils quickly linked to the *eruption* of a volcano, *interruption* and *disruption*
- The impact of cross-linguistic comparison on pupils’ English vocabulary (Fourth Class – 9½+)
  - In a maths lesson the teacher asked: “What is an oblique line?”
  - A Romanian pupil suggested it was like *oblig* in her language, which meant “something you must do”
  - The teacher explained the difference between *oblique* and *oblige*
  - An Irish pupil noted that *obligatory* is like Romanian *oblig*
  - A Filipino pupil offered *obligate*
  - A Lithuanian pupil answered the teacher’s original question: “There’s an oblique line on the end of the letter q”

## How did it work in the classroom? – Plurilingual literacy

- In Senior Infants (5½+) teachers provided worksheets that could be completed in English and Irish/home languages
- In First Class (6½+) pupils produced simple identity texts in English and their home language

My school is Scoil Bhríde.

Moja-szkola to Scoil Bhríde.



My teacher is Miss K—.

Moja nauczycielka jest Panna K—

Senior Infants (5½+)



I am Seven years old

I am from Latvia and my town is called Rīga

I love to wear a cap.

Я люблю есть яблоки.

Я люблю свою маму и папу

Мой папа и моя мама любят меня тоже

First Class (6½+)

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Third Class  
(8½+)

Bhí mé sa pháirc. Bhí  
mé ag scátáil. Thit mé ar  
an talamh. Bhí brón orm.  
Thosaigh mé ag casineadh.  
Thit mé ar mo ghlin, réitín,  
cos agus ceann. Ghlaoigh  
Mamá 999. Tháinig an  
otharchair. Bhí mo chos briste!  
Chuir an bhanaltra  
brindealán mo réitín. Chuaigh  
mé abhaile agus shuigh mé  
síos sa seomra codlata.

I was in the park. I was  
skating. I fell on the  
ground. I was sad. I began  
to cry. I fell on my knees,  
ankles, foot and head. Mam called  
999. The ambulance came.  
My foot was broken. The nurse  
put a bandage on my ankle.  
I went home and I sat  
down in the bedroom.

A parkban vagyok. Épp görkösírom. lestem. Szomorú  
Vagyok. Sírok. Megittöttem a: térdem, a bokám, hasam és a fejem.  
Anyá hívta a: 999-et. A mentő autó jött. lltöttem a  
lábam! A nővér be kötötte a lábam. Haza mentem és  
be ültem a szobában.

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- In Fourth Class (9½+) a Romanian pupil filled six pages of her copybook with a story in English in which several of the characters speak Romanian
- In Fifth Class (10½+) French was added to English, Irish and home languages and was learnt by using it as an alternative medium for exploring curriculum themes

Maison

cithfhocladh

folcha

leithris

doirbeal

bosca bruscair

doirbeal

spóng table est bord agus chaise cathaoir

an cuiseur sorn séchoir briomadóin

cuntar bosca eudai

un machine à laver meaisín niocháin

cuig seomra ann. I mo sheomra folcha, tá sheomra coddála agam. I mo chistin, tá ballaí agus úrláir bán agus glas. Tá cuisneoir, briomadóir, sorn, doirbeal, bord agus ceithre cathaoir sa chistin. Tá blathanna suite ar an mbord. I stigh sa seomra sui tá tolg, bosca bruscair, teilifís, cathaoir compórdach agus seilf agam. I mo sheomra folcha, tá leithris, cithfhocladh agus doirbeal ann. I stigh sa seomra sui tá leaba amháin, vardrús, bord agus cathaoir amháin ann.

J'habite à Blanchardstown. Ma maison est petite. Dans ma maison il y a deux chambre est un salle de Bain est une salon. Dans ma chambre il y a armoire, un lit, table et un chaise et lampe.

මම ජීව්න කරනු ලබන නිවසේ තුළ  
 මට තුනක කාමරයක්, බාහිර පරිසරයක්  
 සහ කුසිනාවක් ඇත. කුසිනාවේ  
 තුළ ජලාශයක්, වර්දුසක්, වටයක් සහ  
 සවිද්‍යා චායුරයක් ඇත.

I live in Blanchardstown. In my house, there are five rooms, a kitchen, two bath-rooms and two bedrooms and a sitting room. In my kitchen, the walls and the floor are white and green. There's a fridge, a dryer, stove, a sink and a table with four chairs.

Is breá liom mo theach. Tá teach mór agam. Níl aon linn snamha i mo theach. Tá mé i mo chónaí i mBaile Bhláineéar. I stigh sa teach tá seomra sui mór. Tá tolg dearg agus glas ann. Tá an teilifís in aice leis an tolg. Tá bord agus dhá chathaoir sa seomra sui fraisin.

French

J'habite à Blanchardstown. Ma maison est grande. Dans ma maison il y a quatre chambre. Dans ma chambre il y a un lit rose et l'armoire. J'aime les couleurs. J'aime la salle de bain, la chambre et la salon. La cuisine est grande. Dans ma cuisine il y a un cuiseur blanc et un réfrigérateur bleu.

Tagalog

Bahay ko ito. Napakakulay. Ang hogdanang ng bahay ko ay mahaba. Ako ay naglalaro ng piano sa kwarto musika araw-araw. English

This my house. I have a big house. In my house there are four bedrooms. I don't have a swimming pool. In my house there is a music room. I like to play piano. My house is very colorful.

Fifth Class (10½+)

## How did it work in the classroom? – Plurilingual literacy

- In Senior Infants (5½+) teachers provided worksheets that could be completed in English and Irish/home languages
- In First Class (6½+) pupils produced simple identity texts in English and their home language
- In Second Class (7½+) and Third Class (8½+) dual language texts became more elaborate, and in Third Class some pupils began to write texts in English, Irish and their home language
- In Fourth Class (9½+) a Romanian pupil filled six pages of her copybook with a story in English in which several of the characters speak Romanian
- In Fifth Class (10½+) French was added to English, Irish and home languages and was learnt by using it as an alternative medium for exploring curriculum themes

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- In Fifth Class (10½+) French was added to English, Irish and home languages and was learnt by using it as an alternative medium for exploring curriculum themes
- In Sixth Class (11½+) pupils engaged in sophisticated language play and wrote confidently in English, Irish, French and their home language

## The Sixth Class fashion show (11½+)

My name is Marceline. I am 15 years old. I am in Holly star High. I am not that girly. I do alot

My favorite is Basketball. I have many trophies from Basketball. I like the colour blue and aqua. you think is beautiful? I really like my friends! I always go skate-boarding with them and go skate-boarding with them! Here is a small part of my story.

Enjoy!

Is mise Marceline. Tá mé cúig bhliain deag d'aois. Tá mé ag freastal ar Holly Star high. Níl fíor calian mé. Is maith liom spóirt. Is aoibhean liom cispheil.

Bhuaigh mé a lán trófaí sa cispheil. Is aoibhín liom na dathana gorm

agus aqua. Is aoibhinn liom mo chairde mé igconáí siopadóireacht le mo

agus ag scatail le mo charaide

Bain taitneamh astu!

Je m'appelle Marceline. J'ai quinze ans.

Je vais à l'école "Holly Star High"

J'aime le sport. J'adore le bleu

J'ai gagné beaucoup de trophées. J'aime les couleurs bleu et aqua. J'adore

amis - je fais le magasin

Je vais avec mon ami

Amusez

我的名字是 Marceline. 我今年 15 岁. 我在 "Holly Star High" 上学. 我不是一个 girly girl. 我很喜欢运动. 我最喜欢的是篮球! 我 ying 了 很多 的 jiang 杯. 我很喜欢蓝色 和 水蓝色 真的 很漂亮! 我非常喜欢我的同学 和朋友! 我 jing 常 和我的同学 出去 gòu wù. 有的 时 hou 和 他们 hua bàn. Enjoy!

# How did it work in the classroom?

## Three bonuses

- Scoil Bhríde's version of plurilingual and intercultural education had a positive impact on the learning of Irish
  - Native-born Irish pupils were motivated to think of Irish as their “home language”
  - Because all pupils first encountered Irish when they start school, the language acted as a bridge between English and minority-language pupils' home languages
- From an early age pupils were motivated to engage in ambitious autonomous learning projects
- Use of home languages fostered pupils' self-esteem
  - Key words in pupils' responses to the question: “What are the benefits of using your home languages in school?”

*possibilities – advantage – exploring – yes!  
personal – friendship – knowledge – expanding  
closer – warm – spark – point of view – perspective  
together – help – learn – supports – great  
speak out – be courageous*

## Overall learning achievement

- Thanks to the strong emphasis on writing, all pupils developed high levels of age-appropriate literacy in English, Irish and French
- Pupils' achievement in Irish was unusual for its range, confidence and fluency – Scoil Bhríde was ranked in the top 12% of primary schools for achievement in Irish
- Pupils from immigrant families also developed age-appropriate literacy in their home language
- Because multiple languages were continuously in focus, pupils acquired unusually high levels of metalinguistic awareness
- In the standardized tests that pupils took each year from First Class (6½+) to Sixth Class (11½+), the school performed consistently above the national average

# But bear in mind ...

## Twenty years of continuous development

- Scoil Bhríde enrolled its first immigrant pupils in the mid-1990s
- The number of pupils from immigrant families grew steadily from the late 1990s to 2014/2015
- The approach I have described was the result of continuous development in an infinite succession of small steps
- To begin with, activities involving home languages were piloted by a small group of more experienced teachers
- Gradually, other teachers joined in as they witnessed the positive impact of these activities
- By 2014/2015 the approach applied to the whole school and was enshrined in a school language policy (Little & Kirwan 2019: 174–178)

## Impact of Council of Europe

- The original decision to include home languages in pupils' educational experience was motivated by two concerns:
  - that immigrant pupils should not lose their home languages
  - that a one-language-only policy would impact negatively on social cohesion in the school
- In the early 2000s, a curriculum framework for EAL based on the CEFR and a version of the European Language Portfolio introduced teachers and pupils to key Council of Europe concepts, notably learner autonomy
- But although Scoil Bhríde's approach coincides closely with what the Recommendation proposes, Council of Europe concepts have played a greater role in describing and analysing the approach than in developing it (Little & Kirwan 2019)

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The experience and example of Scoil Bhríde and other schools working in the same direction, together with reflection on Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)1 and its Explanatory Memorandum, should help other schools to develop their own version of the plurilingual and intercultural approach in much less than 20 years

more experienced teachers

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concepts, notably learner autonomy

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# Conclusion

# A brief recapitulation

- Preliminary considerations
  - The concept of *plurilingual and intercultural education* has profound implications for education at all levels
  - The activities recommended to member states imply a process of reform that is likely to last for many years
  - Meanwhile, much can be achieved now at the level of the educational institution
- Question 1: What is plurilingual and intercultural education?
  - The definition provided by the Recommendation
- Question 2: Why should we want to promote plurilingual and intercultural education?
  - The seven underlying principles set out in the Recommendation
- Question 3: How do we develop and implement plurilingual and intercultural education?
  - The example of Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní)

# A final word

- Educational progress is most efficient when
  - the evolution of policy is informed by successful practice
  - general principles are tested against the realities of lived educational experience
  - the daily realities of school and classroom, college and lecture hall/seminar room, engage critically with the principles that shape policy
- As this webinar was designed to show, Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)1 and its Explanatory Memorandum can be used in two complementary ways
  - To stimulate and guide the development of policy and practice at national level – a complex and long-term process that in principle includes all sectors and levels of education
  - To analyse current policy and practice, especially at institutional level, with a view to discovering what ***plurilingual and intercultural education*** means for learners in classrooms, lecture halls and seminar rooms and undertaking local reform and development
- Without the top-down and bottom-up processes implied by these two uses, Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)1 is unlikely to have the impact that the Council of Europe intends

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