

# Naiscoil na Fuiseoige

January  
1986



## Social benefits of Naiscoil

TWINBROOK AND POLEGLASS estates are situated on the periphery of the greater West Belfast area. Both areas have unemployment rates of 70-75%, and 80% of families have incomes so low that they qualify for housing benefit (according to figures from the NI Housing Executive). Nearly 20% of families are single-parent families. There is an above-average juvenile crime rate in the area with high school truancy rates and low educational attainment amongst the vast majority of children.

Bearing all these factors in mind, we believe that pre-school education of the type we are operating will be of benefit to children, parents and the community as a whole. The benefit to the children educationally and socially has, we feel, been proven by others (in relation to pre-schooling in general).

With regard to parents, the ethos of our naiscoil is to involve the parents in all aspects of its running. Parents elect the committee, raise the finances, help in the 'classroom' etc., and learn Irish together and with their children.

The community benefits because the naiscoil promotes the importance of the Irish language and culture as well as broader ideas on education, self-help and the importance of the role of parents in their children's education. The naiscoil is not a clique or an elite group. Any parent from the area — or outside for that matter — can take part, although we may have to operate a first come, first served basis if the demand gets too big.

We have no restrictions (financial or otherwise) other than that the parents must give a commitment to try and learn Irish if they don't already have the language. Our aim is to involve people, to develop the naiscoil as a community project — not to exclude



people and keep Irish for an elite.

### EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

#### A. For the children

A lot of evidence exists to show that bilingual learning can be very advantageous to children, educationally. For instance, evidence from Canada and the US suggests that the learning of a second language can also "improve the knowledge of an ability to use his mother tongue" (J. Mac Namara, *What happens to children whose home language is not that of school* in G. Verma and C. Bagley's *Race, Education and Identity*, Macmillan, London 1979).

Research evidence also shows that bilingualism in no way educationally handicaps Welsh children who learn English as a second language (G. Price's *Bilingual Education in Wales*, London 1978).

We would go further and suggest that bilingualism is an advantage educationally to children. For example, by the NI Department of Education's own criteria for academic success, the Belfast Irish primary school has attained higher-than-average success with regard to the transfer procedure (to secondary

school) at 11 years of age. In fact, in 1983 there was a 'pass-rate' (according to DENI) of 100% in the school.

#### B. For the education system in the North of Ireland generally.

Naiscoil na Fuiseoige, like the bun-scoil in Belfast, is run by parents, and parents are encouraged to become involved in the day-to-day activities. This is particularly so with Naiscoil na Fuiseoige where we do not only operate as an Irish nursery school for children but also fulfill a social function for parents.

As a result, we believe that the existence and development of projects like ours encourage the idea of greater parental involvement in education in general. The idea that learning is not and should not be confined to one age-group (the five-to-16 year-olds) or one place (the classroom), is important to us. In the North of Ireland there is little parental or community involvement in education and we feel this could be one of the reasons (among many) that so many of our young feel so alienated from even the word 'education'.

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## Social benefits of Naiscoil

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Naiscoil na Faiseoige, therefore, sees itself as not just another pre-school group (albeit an Irish-medium one) but as part of a movement of ideas and concepts which we would like to see taken on and developed by parents generally.

We also wish to promote the ideas of learning through play and educating for life. The ideal aim is not to limit the child's view of education to that of the classroom or the school. How far this can be achieved in practice is difficult to say, however. It would depend on the follow-through in primary and secondary schools, but by establishing the naiscoil it is hoped that we will be helping this ideal to become established within education as a whole.

## Éist le Raidio Feirste.

Tá Raidio Feirste ag craoladh anois — an chéad staisiún raidio do Ghaeilgeoirí sna sé chonadae. De bharr neamhaírd na meán-chumarsáide ar an Ghaeilge tá Gaeil Bhéal Feirste ag cur raidio pobail ar fáil do thart ar 100,000 duine sa chathair. Beidh cláracha ar Raidio Feirste dona náionraí agus d'fhoghlaimoírí na Gaeilge.

Is féidir leat Raidio Feirste a fháil ar MW 200 agus ar AM idir 1400 agus 1600.

Éist leo agus bí leo.

## Aims of the Naiscoil

THE main aim of the naiscoil is to provide Irish language pre-school play and educational facilities for children aged between two and five years old. The naiscoil also provides cultural activities for parents and helps them to improve their knowledge and use of Irish through classes and various other activities. The naiscoil is totally controlled by the parents and it encourages them to play an active part in their children's education.

Anyone agreeing with the general aims can join the naiscoil regardless of race, religion or political persuasion. Children whose first language is not Irish or who have little or no Irish are still welcome. The aim is to provide facilities for children who already speak Irish and also for children whose parents would like them to speak Irish as a second language.

# Demand for Irish in the Twinbrook/Poleglass area

AS THERE has been no language question in the NI Census since 1911 — when the number of Irish speakers was recorded as 29,423 — it is impossible to measure with any great accuracy the number of Irish speakers at present in the North of Ireland (never mind the numbers who, given the opportunity, would like to learn it). We therefore have to look at a number of different trends to gauge the demand for the above project.

### A. The Irish language

The Irish language has always been an important part of life in the North of Ireland. Virtually all towns and place names are derived from Irish including Belfast (Béal Feirste — mouth of the river Farset). A report published by Conradh na Gaeilge in 1978 estimated that every year some 5,000 to 6,000 school children from the six counties travelled to Gaeltacht areas to study Irish. As well as this, some 2,000 English-speaking pupils sit 'O' and 'A' Level examinations each year in Irish (in 1979/80 nearly 28,000 school children were studying Irish at school according to the Department of Education (NI)).

Besides this, Conradh na Gaeilge also runs its own classes — outside the education system — and in 1978 they estimated that 1,000 attended these annually 'producing as many as 2,500 fluent speakers of Irish in a ten-year period'. (*The Case of Ulster Irish on Ulster Radio and TV*, report by a study group, Conradh na Gaeilge, 1978).

Since 1978, of course, there has been a massive increase in the language, especially in the greater West Belfast area, where Naiscoil na Faiseoige is situated. This upsurge was recognised by the awarding of prizes to West Belfast in 1983, 1984 and 1985 in the national Glór na nGael competition for local areas doing the most to encourage the language.

At the moment there are almost 70 adult Irish language classes in West Belfast alone, most of them taught voluntarily and outside the education system — a classic example of self-help if ever there was one! This is some six times the number of such classes which existed in 1978. Besides this, virtually all of West Belfast now has street signs in Irish as well as English which again were paid for and erected voluntarily by local people.

The fact that people were prepared

to spend time and money doing this must reflect a high interest in the language in the area. Nor is this interest just a passing fad. Last August, a survey of all Irish classes in West Belfast (carried out by a researcher at the Social Administration Department of the University of Ulster, Coleraine) discovered that three-quarters of those learning Irish were doing so due to a "desire to promote the speaking of Irish in everyday life". This figure appears to be even more striking when one considers that in the same survey, only 12% of learners actually said they were learning Irish 'as a hobby or pastime'. For a historical analysis of the relevance of Irish in everyday Ulster life, see Pádraig Ó Snodaigh's *Hidden Ulster*.

### B. The bunscoil

Another reflection of the demand for Irish-medium educational activities for children is the growth of the Irish-medium primary school (bunscoil) in Belfast. The school was set up voluntarily by parents in 1971 and eventually after 13 years of existence was recognised for grant-aid by the NI Department of Education in 1984. An example of its success is that in 1976 only six pupils entered Primary 1. By 1983 this figure had risen to 55. By 1982 the school had become so popular that it had to employ a waiting list and restrict numbers.

In September 1984 some 60 entered Primary 1 with a further 70 entering in September 1985. By December 1985 at a time when the numbers enrolling for other schools in the area are actually falling. This is truly remarkable.

In 1980 a new naiscoil opened in the Short Strand area of Belfast, to be followed by further new naiscoileanna in Ardoyne and Twinbrook (September 1984) and the Lower Falls (October 1985).

### C. Demand for Irish in the Twinbrook/Poleglass area.





In the Twinbrook/Poleglass area in 1978 there was one adult Irish language class — now there are 12! Besides these, a lot of people from the area also attend classes outside the area (these are as mentioned above: between 60 and 70 Irish language classes in West Belfast alone). The University of Ulster survey mentioned above, estimated that some 12% of those adults learning Irish in West Belfast came from the Twinbrook/Poleglass area.

Both Twinbrook and Poleglass have bilingual street-signs solely as a result of the efforts of local people. For example, in Twinbrook, with some 1,600 dwellings and an unemployment rate of 70%, £1,500 was collected amongst local people so that the Irish street-signs could be erected. This reflects the support for the language that must exist in the area. Also, many local groups, associations etc (including the Twinbrook Community Association) and shops now have a bilingual policy.

Together with all of this, a large number of parents from the area already send their children to the Belfast bunscoil and in September 1984 20 children from Twinbrook and Poleglass entered the Irish nursery school on the Falls Road. This trend has been continuing over the past few years and there is no reason to believe that it will stop.

Naiscoil na Fuisseoige believes that it could cater for 40 children in September 1986 (providing the new premises are ready) and that the demand will be greater than we can cope with.





# History of Naiscoil na Fuiseoige

IN 1984 the Bunscoil Gaelach in Belfast — the first Irish language Primary School in the North of Ireland — was granted maintained status and obtained some grant-aid assistance from the N.I. Department of Education for the first time since it was set up in 1971.

This decision provided one of the major incentives towards the setting up of Naiscoil na Fuiseoige as an Irish-language pre-school playgroup/nursery school for children in the Twinbrook/Poleglass area of West Belfast. Another incentive was the massive increase in the number of people learning Irish in the area and in the numbers wishing their children to be educated through Irish.

In the spring of 1984 local parents approached Conradh an Gaeilge (the Gaelic League) and asked them to help set up a naiscoil in the Twinbrook/Poleglass area of the city. Eventually, after a series of meetings, the new naiscoil opened its doors in September 1984 in a room in Twinbrook Community Flat, loaned on temporary basis by the local community association. Due to the limited nature of the accommodation the numbers of children involved in



the naiscoil had to be limited whilst attempts were made to obtain better and more permanent premises.

Since September 1984 the naiscoil had operated using voluntary unpaid staff and a worker employed under the Department of Economic Development's ACE scheme. In September 1985, 20 children started in the naiscoil but the naiscoil believes that demand exists in the area for upwards of 40 children. The

premises are just not available to cope with this demand.

During 1985, negotiations were held with various government bodies and a plot of land was obtained on which it was hoped to build the new naiscoil. A Building Fund Appeal was launched and a target date of September 1986 was set for the opening of the new premises. With your support we hope to be able to succeed in this.

## £1.5000 needed by September 1986

NAISCOIL NA FUISEOIGE, the Irish language nursery school for the Twinbrook/Poleglass area of West Belfast, is launching a major building Fund Appeal in order to raise £15,000 over the next year so that new naiscoil premises can be built.

We urge you to contribute to this appeal so that our plan to open the new naiscoil for September 1986 can be fulfilled.

### YOU CAN HELP:

By sending a single donation — by Cheque, money order or postal order.

By making regular payments over four years (e.g. under deed of covenant).

By organising a little event or private collection to raise funds for us.

By contacting us and joining with us in our own fund-raising ventures.

By encouraging friends, local clubs, and business people etc to support us.

### SEND YOUR DONATION to either:

Naiscoil na Fuiseoige,  
(Account no. 85966113)  
The Ulster Bank,  
Andersonstown,  
Belfast BT 11.

or

Naiscoil na Fuiseoige,  
Twinbrook Community Flat,  
1a Jasmine Way,  
Dunmurry,  
Belfast BT 17 OBU.

Please help us — *Cuidigí Linn*

Naiscoil na Fuiseoige is a registered charity (No. XO 31 85 AA) and is affiliated to the following:

An Comhchoiste Réamhscolaíochta Teo

(The Association of Irish language Nurseries in Ireland)

Comhchoiste na Naiscoileanna Bhéal Feirste

(The Association of Irish Nurseries/playgroups in Belfast)

N.I.P.P.A.

(The N.I. Pre-school playgroup Association)

The Play Resource Centre (Belfast)



NAISCOIL NA FUISEOIGE wishes to be able to help provide for some of the demand for Irish-language education in Belfast by providing a properly-equipped Irish nursery school in Twinbrook, and by supporting the setting up of such nurseries/pre-school play-groups throughout the Belfast area. We believe that it is through the children that the present revival in the Irish language can be captured and maintained for the generations to come.

Thus through the naiscoileanna/Bunscoileanna the language can be passed on. At present, there are five naiscoileanna in Belfast with plans for a further two in the near future. This development could be helped by your contribution to the present appeal.