

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
EDUCATION CULTURE AND SPORTS COMMITTEE

**PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP A STAND ALONE GAELIC PRIMARY
SCHOOL FOR GREATER FORT WILLIAM**

**THIS IS A CONSULTATIVE PAPER PREPARED IN TERMS OF THE
EDUCATION AUTHORITY'S AGREED PROCEDURE TO MEET THE
REQUIREMENTS OF THE EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) ACT 1980**

CONSULTATION ON PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP A STAND ALONE GAELIC PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR GREATER FORT WILLIAM

OPTION A

The Status Quo. Fort William Roman Catholic Primary School will continue to deliver education to pupils through the medium of English and the medium of Gaelic.

OPTION B

The development of a stand alone dedicated Gaelic School for Greater Fort William by

- (i) the adaptation of an existing building for a dedicated Gaelic school; or
- (ii) building a free standing new school on a new site; or
- (iii) building a free standing Gaelic school as part of a campus arrangement with a new primary school for Fort William as part of the review of education provision within the town

1.0 BACKGROUND

The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 confirms Gaelic as an official language of Scotland, commanding equal respect with English. The Act established the new public body Bord na Gaidhlig to implement the provisions of the Act, including the production of the first National Plan for Gaelic. The Scottish Government through its approval of the National Plan for Gaelic (2007 - 2012) has set a target to increase the numbers of pupils in Gaelic primary education to 4,000 at the Primary 1 stage by the year 2021.

Highland Council is the first public authority in Scotland to have its Gaelic Language Plan formally approved by Bord na Gaidhlig. The Council's Plan reflects the aspirations of the National Plan.

Gaelic education has now become an accepted way by which many young people are educated in Scotland. In 2007 there were 2,561 pupils receiving Gaelic medium education. Gaelic medium primary education within Highland over the last 15 to 20 years has significantly expanded and proven to be very successful. The 2007 school census showed that, within Highland, 718 primary pupils were educated through the medium of Gaelic in primary classes.

Over the last 20 years, there has been a significant development of Gaelic related job opportunities for young people who are Gaelic bilingual, including access to University, in publishing, in translation, in education, in the caring professions, in tourism, broadcasting and in music and the arts. The economic worth of the language has developed considerably.

Gaelic Medium Education

Within Highland, apart from Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis and the dedicated Gaelic school with one English medium class at Sleat in Skye, Gaelic medium education is delivered to pupils in classes in primary schools which also provide English medium education. In the Gaelic medium classroom, Gaelic is the sole means of spoken communication at all stages and for all aspects of the curriculum. This is known as the 'immersion method' and is an effective means of teaching languages, for a number of reasons:

- the extent of pupils' exposure to Gaelic,
- their use of it for 'real' purposes, and
- the all-Gaelic rule which creates a powerful motivation to acquire the language.

In the English medium classroom, most teaching takes place through the medium of English. Gaelic is usually taught as a second language, as part of the Gaelic for Learners in the Primary School programme [GLPS]. Although practice varies, most schools aim to bring English medium pupils to the 5/14 'Elementary' level in Gaelic.

Within Gaelic medium schools, Gaelic and English should have broadly equal visual prominence, e.g. on signage, letterheads, prospectuses, reports and web pages. Whole school events such as assemblies and social events should be bilingual, both in content and also with regard to the languages used. All school staff, including ancillary staff, should speak Gaelic to Gaelic medium pupils wherever possible.

In practice, many Gaelic Medium Schools have difficulty in ensuring that whole school events are truly bilingual and that all school staff speak Gaelic to Gaelic Medium pupils because not all their staff and pupils are Gaelic speakers.

Research has shown (Enright & McCloskey, 1989) (Snow, Met & Geneses, 1989) that language is acquired most effectively when it is learned for communication in meaningful and significant social situations.

The Gaelic School

In a dedicated Gaelic School, Gaelic is the means by which all staff and pupils interact: the culture of the school is Gaelic and all staff and pupils communicate through the Gaelic language at all times and in all situations. In effect, the 'immersion method' which prevails in the Gaelic medium classroom is extended to the whole school and to the whole of the pupils' school day. This whole Gaelic environment helps to ensure young people develop their Gaelic language outside the classroom as well as in it. It gives young people the opportunity to play and learn in an environment that is totally focussed on Gaelic. Research indicates that total immersion programmes are the most effective approach available to second language teaching in school settings (Genesee, 1994)

Gaelic Education

In both Gaelic Medium and 'Gaelic' schools, pupils are taught English reading and writing alongside Gaelic, from P3 onwards and are expected to reach the same level of competence, in all skills, in both languages by the end of primary school.

Pupils educated through Gaelic Medium are bilingual by the time they complete their primary education. Research commissioned by the Scottish Office, (Johnstone 1999) concluded that *'pupils in Gaelic-medium primary education ... were not disadvantaged in comparison with children educated through English. In many, though not all, instances they outperformed English medium pupils and in addition gave the advantage of becoming proficient in two languages'*.

2.0 CURRENT SITUATION

Over the last decade there has been interest, at national and Highland level, in establishing dedicated Gaelic schools. In 1999 all-Gaelic primary provision was developed at Bunsgoil Ghaidhlig Ghlaschu (Glasgow) with significant success. In 2007 Highland Council established a Gaelic school in Inverness and a dedicated school with an English medium class at Sleat Primary School on the Isle of Skye. The council has agreed in the Gaelic language plan 2007-2011 to progress the development of all Gaelic schools by reacting positively when opportunities arise to do so. This is a commitment within the Council's Programme for Administration. The Administration is also of the view that stand-alone Gaelic schools should form a focus for developing Gaelic in the community and raising the profile of Gaelic generally.

In Highland, during session 2007-2008, of a total of 718 pupils learning Gaelic, 566 primary pupils were educated in Gaelic classes within Gaelic medium schools (2007 school census). 103 pupils were learning through the medium of Gaelic at Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis stand-alone Gaelic primary school and 47 pupils were learning through the medium of Gaelic in Bun-sgoil Sleat.

Almost half of the above 566 primary pupils live in communities in Eilean a' Cheò ward, the Caol and Mallaig ward and the Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward. These areas are rich in Gaelic language and culture. Within Lochaber, Gaelic medium education is delivered in three primary schools situated in Acharacle (21 primary pupils and 6 nursery pupils), Fort William (70 primary pupils and 16 nursery pupils) and Mallaig (34 primary pupils and 10 nursery pupils). (Figures as at 3 July 2008)

Over several years there has been community interest expressed in providing a stand-alone Gaelic primary school for the Greater Fort William area. Comann nam Pàrant an Gearasdan issued a questionnaire to all parents with children receiving Gaelic education to ascertain the demand for a stand alone Gaelic School in Lochaber. To date they have received 65 positive responses including parents in Fort William and the outlying areas.

Fort William Roman Catholic Primary School

Non-denominational Gaelic medium education is currently provided in Fort William Roman Catholic Primary School for the Greater Fort William area.

Fort William RC Primary School serves the town of Fort William and surrounding area for Roman Catholic English medium education. The Gaelic medium provision serves the town of Fort William and outlying villages and townships up to a radius of 10 miles or thereabouts. The school also provides English and Gaelic pre-school education for both three and four-year olds.

From August 2008 there will be 8 mainstream classes in the school made up of 4 classes in the English medium department and 4 classes in the Gaelic medium department.

Table 1 displays the school roll from 2003-2004 to 2008-2009:

TABLE 1: Fort William RC Primary School Roll 2003-2004 to 2008-2009

Year		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total	Combined TOTAL	%
2003-2004	GM	12	15	7	9	12	13	1	69	160	43%
2003-2004	EM	13	10	8	9	20	18	13	91		57%
2004-2005	GM	9	12	14	7	9	13	12	76	171	44%
2004-2005	EM	13	9	11	11	10	21	20	95		56%
2005-2006	GM	10	8	11	13	7	9	13	71	155	46%
2005-2006	EM	9	14	9	10	10	10	22	84		54%
2006-2007	GM	9	10	8	11	13	7	9	67	145	46%
2006-2007	EM	9	11	15	8	14	9	12	78		54%
2007-2008	GM	14	8	10	8	11	13	6	70	144	49%
2007-2008	EM	5	9	11	16	8	15	10	74		51%
2008-2009	GM	9	14	8	9	8	11	13	72	148	49%
2008-2009	EM	8	5	9	12	18	9	15	76		51%

It is clear from Table 1 that the Gaelic medium roll as a percentage of the school roll has been gradually increasing from 2003-2004 to 2007-2008 and it is predicted to be 49% of the total school roll for session 2008-2009 (72 pupils). Whilst the percentage of Gaelic medium pupils in the school has increased, the actual number of pupils has remained fairly static in the low 70s.

Table 1a
Fort William RC Primary Pre-School Roll and Projections 2003-2011

Year		3yr	4yr	TOTAL	Combined TOTAL	%
2003-2004	GM	12	6	18	37	49%
2003-2004	EM	19	0	19		51%
2004-2005	GM	14	7	21	35	60%
2004-2005	EM	14	0	14		40%
2005-2006	GM	10	14	24	40	60%
2005-2006	EM	10	6	16		40%
2006-2007	GM	12	7	19	43	44%
2006-2007	EM	8	16	24		56%
2007-2008	GM	8	8	16	42	38%
2007-2008	EM	13	13	26		62%
2008-2009	GM	4	7	11	30	37%
2008-2009	EM	7	12	19		63%
2009-2010	GM	8	4	12	27	44%
2009-2010	EM	8	7	15		56%
2010-2011	GM	8	8	16	32	50%
2010-2011	EM	8	8	16		50%

Table 1a displays the pre-school rolls for Gaelic medium and English medium pupils from 2003-2004 to projected figures for 2010-2011. Although there has been a decrease in the percentage of young people taking up Gaelic medium nursery provision in relation to those taking up English medium provision up to 2008-2009, it is predicted that from session 2008-2009 onwards there will be an increase in the percentage Gaelic medium pre-school pupils. With Gaelic medium pre-school provision in 2010-2011 predicted to be 16 pupils, 50% of the total roll.

Table 2
Gaelic medium catchment at 2007-2008 (Figures as at 3 July 2008)

	Gaelic medium
Claggan & Inverlochty	9
Upper Achintore	12
Plantation	5
Caol, Lochyside	13
Banavie, Corpach	6
An Aird	4
Fort William	11
Torlundy	0
Spean & Roy Bridge	3
Glen Nevis	3
Achaphubuil & Glenfinnan	4
	70

Table 2 displays the areas of Greater Fort William and beyond from which the current Gaelic medium school population reside. In session 2007-2008, 44 of the 70 children enrolled in the school come from the town of Fort William with 19 pupils residing in the Caol, Lochyside, Banavie and Corpach area. Currently there are 7 children attending from Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge, Achaphubuil and Glenfinnan areas.

3.0 FACTORS AFFECTING FUTURE PROVISION

The roll of Fort William RC Primary School is projected over the next five years in terms of known births and taking into account the effect of potential additional housing. Calculating accurately projections for Gaelic medium rolls is difficult. A decision can be taken to enrol a child in Gaelic medium education by families who live in the catchment of other schools within the Greater Fort William area.

The following projections are based on the information contained in the School Roll Forecasts available on the Highland Council intranet and from the anticipated roll figures from August 2008 supplied by the school. The projections detailed below were calculated by taking the overall number of young people who have attended the Gaelic medium provision in Fort William RC as a fraction of the total number of young people eligible for school in the Greater Fort William area. This ratio was then applied to the number of births within Greater Fort William for the years 2006 and 2007.

Table 3
FORT WILLIAM RC PROJECTED PRE-SCHOOL AND PRIMARY ROLL 2009 – 2013

Year		3 year old	4 year old	Pre-school Total	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total	Combined Total
2009-2010	GM	8	4	12	4	9	14	8	9	8	11	63	75
2009-2010	EM	8	7	15	12	8	5	9	11	16	9	70	85
2010-2011	GM	8	8	16	4	4	9	14	8	9	8	56	72
2010-2011	EM	8	8	16	7	12	8	5	9	11	16	68	84
2011-2012	GM	8	8	16	8	4	4	9	14	8	9	56	72
2011-2012	EM	8	8	16	8	7	12	8	5	9	11	60	76
2012-2013	GM	8	8	16	8	8	4	4	9	14	8	55	71
2012-2013	EM	8	8	16	8	8	7	12	8	5	9	57	73

The total roll for the combined school, nursery and primary, is predicted to drop from 186 pupils for session 2007-2008 to 144 pupils by 2013. This is line with the general drop in birth rate within the area. However, it should be noted that the percentage of young people predicted to choose Gaelic medium education remains stable around 49% of the school roll.

It is predicted that pre-school 3 and 4 year old numbers will stabilise around 16 pupils from 2011 to 2012/2013.

4.0 POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTIONS

Having regard to the Council's programme for administration to progress the development of all Gaelic medium education primary schools as and when opportunities arise and the wish expressed by Comann nam Pàrant an Gearasdan through parental questionnaires, for such provision the authority has identified the undernoted options:

Option A

The Status Quo – maintain the existing provision for Gaelic medium education in Fort William RC Primary School.

Option B

The development of a stand alone dedicated Gaelic School for Greater Fort William by

- (i) the adaptation of an existing building for a dedicated Gaelic school; or
- (ii) building a free standing new school on a new site; or
- (iii) building a free standing Gaelic school as part of a campus arrangement with a new primary school for Fort William, the nature and location of which would be identified as part of a wider Fort William Educational Review

5.0 CONSEQUENCES OF POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION

Option A Status Quo

Fort William Roman Catholic School will continue to deliver education to pupils through the medium of English and the medium of Gaelic.

Option B The development of a stand alone dedicated Gaelic School for Greater Fort William by

- (i) the adaptation of an existing building for a dedicated Gaelic school; or
- (ii) building a free standing new school on a new site; or
- (iii) building a free standing Gaelic school as part of a campus arrangement with a new primary school for Fort William the nature and location of which would be identified as part of a wider Fort William Educational Review

All Gaelic education provision within the Greater Fort William area will be concentrated in a new dedicated Gaelic primary school which will also be a focus for Gaelic in the community and in raising the profile of Gaelic generally. Further consequences of Option B are dependent on which of the above three alternative sites is chosen to develop the school. Each of which will have significant capital cost implications which have yet to be fully identified and would be require to be included in the Education, Culture & Sport Capital Programme.

(i) Adaptation of an existing building

It may be possible to convert a part of Camaghael Hostel, Fort William, as a stand-alone 21st century Gaelic School accommodating 72 - 96 pupils with nursery provision and giving the capacity to allow future growth, possibly sharing sports facilities with Lochaber High School. This option would require a feasibility study to be undertaken to ascertain the suitability of Camaghael Hostel for conversion to a primary school and to

quantify the costs involved and require to be included in the ECS Capital Programme. It should be noted that part of Camaghael Hostel will be used by Lochaber High School during the High School renovation period up to the end of 2012, however the specific requirements will become clearer in 2009 once the Phase II programme has been developed.

(ii) building a free standing new school on a new site.

Discussions have taken place with the Estate Strategy Manager regarding the feasibility of building a stand-alone Gaelic school on one of three sites in Fort William, two in Highland Council ownership and another in private ownership. Further work will be required to identify the suitability of these sites and the costs of development and these options would require feasibility studies to be undertaken to ascertain their suitability for the construction of a new school and to quantify the costs involved.

(iii) building a free standing Gaelic school as part of a campus arrangement with a new primary school for Fort William as part of the review of education provision within the town.

Currently the only suitable site identified is in private ownership and it is envisaged as part of a review of educational provision in the Greater Fort William area that the campus arrangement would comprise a dedicated Gaelic school and a new English medium primary school for the west end of Fort William. Both schools may share common facilities such as dining room, assembly/gym, administration where appropriate. Given the information regarding the learning of the Gaelic language through social activities and depending upon space available, two separate suitably sized playground may be considered.

All three of the above site options have a number of similar consequences:

Transport implications

In session 2007-08 of the Gaelic medium roll of 70 pupils, 28 were provided with free school transport. This may marginally increase depending on which site is chosen for the dedicated Gaelic school. It is not envisaged that there will be significant transport costs associated with this proposal.

From 2000 the authority has operated a policy whereby free transport has been provided for Gaelic medium pupils within a 10 mile radius of the Gaelic medium school. However, local factors affecting access to Gaelic Medium provision are also considered on a case by case basis.

Staffing implications

It would be necessary to appoint a Head Teacher and other promoted posts for the new school. The salary for these posts would require to be job sized.

Teaching staff. The current staff within the Gaelic medium provision at Fort William RC Primary School would be redeployed to the new school taking into account the roll

of the school at that time.

Ancillary staff. Ancillary staff supporting directly the delivery of Gaelic medium education would be redeployed to the dedicated school.

Community use of Buildings

There would be no change to the continuing use of Fort William RC Primary School Building by the community (within the Authority's Community use policies.) There would be additional community use provided for the community by the development of a dedicated Gaelic school which would create a focus and hub for Gaelic development in the community.

Delineated areas

There would be no change to the current delineated area for English medium pupils attending Fort William RC Primary School. Gaelic language pupils attending the dedicated Gaelic school would continue to be drawn from the Greater Fort William area and those residing within a 10-mile radius of the town or thereby.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This consultation paper is issued in terms of the Authority's agreed procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation period, a report and submissions received will be presented to the ECS Committee of the Highland Council.

Representations regarding this paper should be made in writing to:

John Ritchie, Area Education Culture and Sport Manager, Ross, Skye and Lochaber, Highland Council, Area Education Office, Camaghael Hostel, Camaghael, Fort William, by 10 October 2008.

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