

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**  
**GAELIC COMMITTEE – 5 JUNE 2008**

Agenda Item	5.
Report No	G/11/08

**CONSULTATION ON GAELIC MEDIUM EDUCATION PROVISION  
IN GREATER FORT WILLIAM AREA**

**Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service**

**Summary**

This report provides detail on the current arrangements for Gaelic medium education provision for pupils living in the Greater Fort William area. It outlines for members possible options for the development of a dedicated Gaelic school. The Council has agreed in the Council's Gaelic Language Plan 2007-11 and in its Programme for Administration to progress the development of all Gaelic Medium education primary schools.

Members are asked to consider the options detailed in this report and decide which of these should be included in a statutory formal consultation paper to be drafted for consideration by the Education, Culture and Sport committee.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 Gaelic medium primary education within Highland over the last 15 to 20 years has significantly expanded and proven to be very successful. The September 2007 school census showed that within Highland, 716 primary pupils were educated in Gaelic medium classes.
- 1.2 Gaelic medium education may be delivered in one of two ways - dual language schools or through dedicated Gaelic schools. In the Greater Fort William area Gaelic medium education is currently provided through dual language provision.
- 1.3 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 the 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 of the dual language school is extended to the whole school and to the whole of the pupils' school day.

In both dual language and in dedicated Gaelic school's Gaelic medium pupils are taught English reading and writing, alongside Gaelic, from P3. Pupils are expected to reach the same level of competence, in all skills, in both languages. By the end of primary school, they leave primary education as bilingual learners.

- 1.4 Over the last seven years 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 unit 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 aiming as and when at two new schools in the lifetime of the plan. This is a commitment within the Council's Programme for Administration.

## **2.0 Current Situation**

- 2.1 In Highland, during session 2007-2008, 716 primary pupils were educated in Gaelic classes within Gaelic medium schools (September schools census 2007).

Almost half of these 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.

- 2.2 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 (31 primary pupils and 10 nursery pupils).
- 2.3 Over several years there has been community interest expressed in delivering a stand-alone Gaelic primary school in the Greater Fort William area.
- 2.4 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.

## **3.0 Consultation**

- 3.1 The development of a stand-alone Gaelic school would require a statutory consultation following the council's set procedures. A consultative paper would need to be prepared outlining options which may include:

The status quo - the status quo would maintain the existing provision for Gaelic Medium education.

A dedicated Gaelic school - a number of options are available:-

- a) Adaptation of an existing building not currently used for educational purposes.
- b) Free standing new school on a green field site
- c) Free standing new Gaelic medium 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.

- d) Re-zoning an existing primary school as a dedicated Gaelic school

3.2 The above options have not at this stage been investigated in detail. This would require to be done prior to a statutory consultation taking place.

#### **4.0 THE CONSULTATION PROCESS**

4.1 The consultation procedure will include distribution of the consultation paper to:

- a)
  - (i) Parents of pupils affected including parents of pre-school pupils.
  - (ii) Members of Parliament and Members of Scottish Parliament.
  - (iii) Parent Council/Forum
- b) Public advertisement of availability of consultation paper.
- c) Meetings of parents will be convened, with a minimum of 14 days' notice. The Authority will be represented at such meetings by:
  - (i) Chairman and/or Vice-Chairman of the Education Culture and Sport Committee and Chairman of the Gaelic committee.
  - (ii) Local Councillor(s) not otherwise covered by above.
  - (iii) Director of Education, Culture & Sport or his Representative.
- d) Following publication of the consultation paper a minimum of 28 days will be allowed for the submission of written comments to the Area Education, Culture and Sport Manager.
- e) At the end of the consultation period all written submissions and minutes of meetings will be presented to the Education Culture & Sport Committee for consideration and decision.

4.2 A possible timeline for the progress of these proposals is as follows:

- 5th June - Gaelic Committee considers the options to be included in the formal statutory consultation papers.
- 7<sup>th</sup> August - Education, Culture and Sport Committee agrees the paper for public consultation
- 13 November- Education, Culture and Sport Committee considers the outcome of the consultation process and determines future provision for Gaelic Medium education in the Greater Fort William area

## **5.0 Recommendations**

5.1 The Committee is requested to:

1. Discuss the options outlined above and consider other possible options.
2. Decide whether or not to go to a statutory consultation paper regarding the development of a stand-alone Gaelic school for the Greater Fort William area.

If members agree to 2. then

- Decide on the options to be incorporated into the formal consultation paper.
- Instruct officers to prepare a draft statutory consultation paper for consideration by the Education, Culture and Sport committee.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service

Date: 26 May 2008

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Background Papers: 'Status and Ethos in Schools with Gaelic Medium Education' (2002)  
Highland Council Gaelic Plan 2007-2011