

**REPORT BY HM INSPECTORATE OF EDUCATION (HMIE) ON THE EDUCATIONAL ASPECTS OF THE PROPOSAL BY THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL TO CHANGE PROVISION OF EDUCATION IN STAFFIN, ISLE OF SKYE, AT PRESENT AN ENGLISH MEDIUM SCHOOL WITH GAELIC MEDIUM PROVISION, TO A GAELIC MEDIUM SCHOOL WITH ENGLISH MEDIUM PROVISION FROM AUGUST 2011.**

**1. Introduction**

1.1 The Highland Council, in response to representations from the Parent Council of Staffin Primary School, proposes to change provision of education in Staffin, Isle of Skye. At present Staffin Primary School is an English medium school with Gaelic medium provision. The proposal seeks to change the school's status to a Gaelic medium school with English medium provision. The proposals as stated do not involve the discontinuance or reconfiguration of either Gaelic medium education or English medium education at any class stage.

1.2 This report has been prepared by HMIE in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*.

1.3 HM Inspectors' role is to report on the educational aspects of the proposal. HMIE undertook the following activities:

- scrutiny of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, including the original proposal, and the consultation documents;
- consideration of written and oral representations including from the public meeting required by the Act, and the council's own report on the outcomes of the consultation; and
- scrutiny of further information on all establishments affected.

1.4 HMIE considered:

- the likely effects for any other users of the school buildings, for children likely to become pupils, and for pupils of any other schools in the local authority area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

## 2. Consultation process

2.1 Overall, the council carried out the consultation with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The consultation included an invitation for written submissions and a public meeting, held in November 2010. Written transcripts of the proceedings at the public meeting were submitted as part of the consultation process.

2.2 The public meeting provided an appropriate forum for the expression of views. At the public meeting there was strong support for the principle of the proposed change of provision.

2.3 The papers which the council submitted as part of the consultation process offered a range of information related to the projected rolls in the English medium class at Staffin Primary School and in the Gaelic medium classes at Staffin Primary School. The council provided helpful information regarding the relevant school roll and provision at the nearest primary school, Kilmuir Primary School.

2.4 The council's papers state that the proposal would ensure that the programme of establishing Gaelic medium schools continues to be implemented. The council's papers do not make fully clear what the council consider to be the educational benefits for children arising from this proposal. To ensure best value, in taking forward similar proposals in future the council may wish to seek advice as to whether carrying out such consultations with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* is the most appropriate means of consultation.

2.5 In the one item of subsequent correspondence received, the Parent Council of Staffin Primary School raised concerns about the proposed change of provision in the light of possible staffing changes within Staffin Primary School. These concerns related to a proposed 0.5 full-time equivalent reduction in the staffing arrangements within the Gaelic medium classes in August 2011. The Parent Council also raised concerns about the continuation of the present system of English medium instruction for Gaelic medium pupils by all specialist teachers such as art and design teachers and physical education teachers.

## 3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1 Figures provided by Highland Council show that in August 2010 Staffin Primary School had a roll of 31 pupils, comprising five pupils in the English medium class, 25 in the Gaelic medium class and one child in the Gaelic medium nursery class. There is no English medium nursery provision. The roll in the English medium class has declined in recent years. At the time of the last HMIE inspection in 2004 the roll was 59, including 16 in the nursery

class. Twenty-nine pupils were in the Gaelic-medium classes and 14 in the English-medium class.

3.2 The proposal to change Staffin Primary School's status from an English medium school with Gaelic medium provision to a Gaelic medium school with English medium provision has some potential to provide educational benefit to children. In the Gaelic medium classes, children's self esteem may be improved as a consequence of the recognition of the status of their spoken language. The proposals as stated would involve no change of class configuration or of provision in either English medium teaching or Gaelic medium teaching. No class stage teaching would be discontinued and there would be no additional provision. It is not clear from the proposals what the wider educational benefits would be for the children presently in Staffin Primary School.

3.3 The council, in taking forward the proposals, may wish to make clearer what impact the change of provision will have on aspects of learning and teaching such as instruction by specialist teachers in English to children in the Gaelic medium classes. The council should also clarify to what extent Gaelic medium pupils will actually learn and be taught through the medium of Gaelic, should the falling school roll result in a decrease in staffing provision and children in the Gaelic medium classes continue to be taught in English in aspects of the curriculum. It is not yet clear from the proposals how the benefits of language immersion for children in the Gaelic medium classes will be greater should the proposals be implemented.

#### **4. Summary**

4.1 The proposal from The Highland Council to change provision of education in Staffin, Isle of Skye by changing Staffin Primary School from an English medium school with Gaelic medium provision to a Gaelic medium school with English medium provision has the potential to offer some benefits to children. Children in the Gaelic medium class may benefit from improved self esteem as a result of the increased recognition of their spoken language. The council's proposals have not yet made clear the extent to which the change of provision will improve the education of children in the Gaelic medium classes and in the English medium class. The council needs to clarify the extent to which, should these proposals be implemented, lessons and instruction for children in the Gaelic medium classes will be conducted fully in Gaelic.

**HM Inspectorate of Education  
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