

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
EDUCATION CULTURE AND SPORTS COMMITTEE

**PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP A STAND ALONE GAELIC PRIMARY
SCHOOL FOR PORTREE AND COMMUNITIES CURRENTLY
SERVED BY THE GAELIC MEDIUM PROVISION IN PORTREE
PRIMARY SCHOOL, ISLE OF SKYE**

**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 PORTTREE AND COMMUNITIES CURRENTLY SERVED BY THE GAELIC MEDIUM PROVISION IN PORTTREE PRIMARY SCHOOL, ISLE OF SKYE

OPTION A

The Status Quo. The status quo would maintain the existing provision for Gaelic medium education.

OPTION B

The development of a stand alone dedicated Gaelic School for Portree and communities currently served by the Gaelic Medium provision in Portree Primary School 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.

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 2,601 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 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. International 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, p.4) 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 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. 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 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. It is projected for session 2008-2009 that 267 pupils within Skye will be educated through the medium of Gaelic. Portree Primary School has by far the largest number of Gaelic medium pupils with 100 enrolled for session 2008-2009.

Recently there has been an expression of interest from the community in providing a stand-alone Gaelic primary school for Portree.

Portree Primary School

Portree Primary School provides Non-denominational Gaelic medium and English medium education for the village of Portree and surrounding townships.

The English medium provision serves this catchment whilst the Gaelic medium provision serves the catchment of Portree Primary and the townships of Kensaleyre, Suledale, Bernisdale and Skeabost. (see table 2)

The school also provides Gaelic pre-school education for both three and four-year olds.

The main school building dates from 1991. In 1996 an extension was built to cater for an increasing roll. In November 2006 Sgoil Araich, the Gaelic medium nursery also moved to the school campus from its former site at Elgin Hostel.

There are presently 11 mainstream classes in the school made up of 6 classes in the English medium department and 5 classes in the Gaelic medium department. The school also houses a special needs base called The Sunshine Room.

School Roll

TABLE 1: Portree Primary School Roll 2003-2004 to 2008-2009

Portree Primary		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Total	Combined TOTAL	%
2003-2004	GM	14	12	15	18	18	18	18	113	258	44%
2003-2004	EM	21	17	19	15	28	22	23	145		56%
2004-2005	GM	17	14	12	16	18	18	18	113	266	42%
2004-2005	EM	12	22	20	23	19	32	25	153		58%
2005-2006	GM	8	16	13	12	16	17	18	100	239	42%
2005-2006	EM	15	12	18	21	21	20	32	139		58%
2006-2007	GM	13	10	14	14	12	16	17	96	231	42%
2006-2007	EM	16	15	14	18	22	25	25	135		58%
2007-2008	GM	17	12	9	14	14	15	17	98	235	42%
2007-2008	EM	16	17	15	17	19	28	25	137		58%
2008-2009	GM	14	17	12	10	15	15	16	99	236	42%
2008-2009	EM	16	17	18	14	16	28	28	137		58%

It is clear from Table 1 that the Gaelic medium roll as a percentage of the school roll has been stable at around 42% over the last five years and is predicted to stay at 42% of the total school roll for session 2008-2009.

TABLE 1a: Portree Primary Pre-School Roll 2003-2004 to 2008-2009

Portree Primary		3yr	4yr	TOTAL	Combined TOTAL	%
2003-2004	GM	n/a	18	18	57	32%
2003-2004	EM	18	21	39		68%
2004-2005	GM	13	8	21	62	34%
2004-2005	EM	20	21	41		66%
2005-2006	GM	14	12	26	63	41%
2005-2006	EM	20	17	37		59%
2006-2007	GM	18	14	32	71	45%
2006-2007	EM	18	21	39		55%
2007-2008	GM	16	16	32	74	43%
2007-2008	EM	26	16	42		57%
2008-2009	GM	10	16	26	62	42%
2008-2009	EM	11	25	36		58%

Table 1a displays the nursery rolls for Gaelic medium and English medium pupils for the last five years. The table shows that there has been an increase in Gaelic medium pre-school enrolments from 32% in session 2003-2004 to 43% in session 2007-2008. It is predicted that for session 2008-2009 there will be 26 Gaelic medium pre-school pupils and 36 English medium pre-school pupils.

Table 2

Gaelic medium catchment at 2007-2008

	Gaelic medium
Kensaleyre	8
Suledale, Bernisdale & Skeabost	8
Total	16

Table 2 displays the areas outwith Portree which the current Gaelic medium school population reside. In session 2007-2008, there were 8 pupils living in the township of Kensaleyre and 8 pupils living in the townships of Suledale, Bernisdale and Skeabost.

3.0 FACTORS AFFECTING FUTURE PROVISION

The roll of Portree Primary School is projected over the next five years in terms of known births and taking into account the effect of potential additional housing.

The following projections are based on the information contained in the School Roll Forecasts available on the Highland Council intranet and the August 2008-2009 roll provided by Portree Primary School..

Table 3

Portree Projected Pre-school and Primary EM and GM Roll 2009 – 2013

Year					P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	Primary Total	Total
		3 year old	4 year old	Pre-school Total									
2009-2010	GM	7	8	15	14	14	14	10	13	17	17	99	114
2009-2010	EM	14	19	33	18	19	18	14	17	23	24	133	166
2010-2011	GM	3	7	10	8	14	14	14	11	13	17	91	101
2010-2011	EM	10	16	28	19	19	19	19	14	18	24	131	159
2011-2012	GM	11	7	18	7	8	14	15	14	11	14	83	101
2011-2012	EM	16	14	30	14	20	20	20	20	15	19	127	157
2012-2013	GM	11	11	22	11	7	8	15	15	15	11	93	115
2012-2013	EM	15	15	30	16	15	20	20	21	20	16	128	158

It is predicted that the Gaelic pre-school population will show a fall in year 2010-2011 but will grow thereafter. However, the total roll for Portree Primary School is predicted to see a small decline of 7 pupils from 2009-2010 to 2012-2013. Gaelic medium primary pupil numbers will decline by 6 over this period. This is in line with the general trend in pupil numbers for Skye as a whole. Significant house building is being undertaken in Portree which has been incorporated in to the above projections.

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 and the wish expressed by some members of the community for such provision the authority has identified the undernoted options:

Option A

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

Option B

The development of a stand alone dedicated Gaelic School 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.

5.0 CONSEQUENCES OF POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION

Option A Status Quo

Portree Primary 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 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;

All Gaelic medium provision within the current delineated area of Portree Primary School will be delivered in a new dedicated Gaelic school. Further consequences of Option B are dependent on which of the above two alternative sites is chosen. Each of which will have significant capital cost implications which have yet to be fully costed.

(i) Adaptation of an existing building

One building in Portree would need to be identified which is sufficient for the development of a stand-alone 97-121 pupil 21st century Gaelic School providing nursery and primary provision with the capacity to allow future growth. An option exists for Elgin Hostel, Portree. This would involve the sharing of sports facilities with Portree High School. This option would require a feasibility study to be undertaken to ascertain the suitability of adaptation and to quantify the costs involved. It should be noted that other opportunities also exist for the development of this building.

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

A site would have to be identified with the capability of providing a 100 pupil 21st century school plus nursery and with the capacity to allow future growth and associated playing fields. This option would require a feasibility study to identify a suitable site for the construction of a new school and to quantify the costs involved.

Both of the above options have a number of similar consequences:

Transport implications

In session 2007-08 of the Gaelic medium roll of 98, 16 were provided with free school transport. This is unlikely to change. It is not envisaged that there will be a significant transport cost associated with this proposal.

From 2000 the authority has operated a policy whereby free transport has been provided within a 10 mile radius of a 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 Portree 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 Portree Primary School Building by the community (within the Authority's Community use policies.) The new Portree High School has a wide range of community facilities and it is anticipated that these would be used by the Gaelic community in the main and any facilities in a new Gaelic school would be for primary and associated early education purposes only.

Delineated areas

There would be no change to the current delineated area for English medium pupils attending Portree Primary School. Gaelic language pupils attending the dedicated Gaelic school would continue to be drawn from Portree and those residing in the communities of Kenseleyre, Suledale, Bernisdale and Skeabost. The current delineated area of Staffin and Kilmuir Primary Schools would not be affected.

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, Elgin Hostel, Dunvegan Road, Portree, Isle of Skye by 10 October 2008.

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