

Report by Education Scotland to address educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to establish a catchment area for the new Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh, and to simultaneously establish formal catchment areas for the provision of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) for schools within the Portree Associated School Group (ASG).

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of The Highland Council's proposal to set catchment areas for GME provision within the ASG for Portree High School. This entails defining a catchment area for the new GME school at Portree, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh which is planned to open in February 2018. This proposal also establishes formal catchment areas for all other primary GME provisions on the Isle of Skye. Raasay Primary School is on an island adjacent to the Isle of Skye and is part of the catchment area of Portree High School. The proposal states that, should there be a parental request for GME provision to be provided at Raasay Primary School, this would be assessed in line with the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include a copy of this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all legislative obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people who are currently in GME provision; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council 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
- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the public meetings held on 13 and 14 September 2017 in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal; and
- visits to Broadford Primary School, Bun-sgoil Shlèite, Bun-sgoil Stafainn, Dunvegan Primary School, Kilmuir Primary School and Portree Primary School, including discussions with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 The Highland Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and the amendments in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

2.2 The consultation process ran from 28 August 2017 to 25 October 2017. During that time, the council held public meetings at Broadford, Dunvegan and Portree. The attendance at two of these meetings was very low, with no one attending the other meeting. Announcements were placed in the local press and on the council's online services. Statutory consultees, including parents/carers, children, staff and Bòrd na Gàidhlig were informed of the consultation. Other Gaelic organisations, such as Comann nam Pàrant, were also advised. The council published documentation for the consultation on its website. They also distributed papers to a full range of stakeholders and interested parties. The council put in place suitable arrangements to enable interested parties to respond to the proposal, whether that be electronically or in writing. The number of written responses received was very low. A response was received from Bòrd na Gàidhlig which supported the proposal. The council undertook a consultation with pupils to ensure their views were sought. Overall, consultees supported the council's proposal to establish catchment areas for GME, with a few concerns expressed.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The Highland Council is demonstrating its continued commitment to the growth of the Gaelic sector through this proposal. The council has secured strong support for their proposal to set catchment areas which are specific to GME provisions. Almost all of the consultees recognise that, in many respects, The Highland Council are formalising arrangements which have evolved as they have met requests for GME on the Isle of Skye over time. Almost all consultees appreciate the potential clarity that designating catchment areas may bring. Parents have justifiable concerns about a few aspects of the proposal. In taking its proposal

forward, the council needs to engage with stakeholders to address these concerns as outlined in this report.

3.2 Some of the parents that met with HM Inspectors felt that the maps provided with the proposal document are too general and do not give enough detail. They would like to see precise details of the boundaries of catchment areas.

3.3 A few stakeholders in the locality of Struan felt that their catchment area should be that of Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh rather than the stated Dunvegan Primary School. This was to enable cluster work to be the same as that for English medium. Going forward, the council should ascertain if this would have impact for collaborative activity. In the south of the island, a few pupils and parents were unclear of how the proposed catchment areas would impact on the secondary school that they would attend. Others sought clarity on how the proposal would impact on the arrangements for transport for GME provisions.

3.4 A few parents are seeking reassurances that current arrangements for accessing GME will be continued, should the proposal be accepted. In these cases, current placements of children do not concur with the proposed catchment areas. This would also apply to siblings who might, as a result of the proposed catchment areas, be scheduled to attend different primary schools. The proposal paper does not provide details of how a solution will be found to this.

3.5 The proposal involves the establishment of a catchment area for a new GME primary school in Portree. While this expansion in provision is very welcome, there are some concerns that, in the future, parents from outwith Portree's catchment area may opt for this school rather than their local GME provision. Parents in areas beyond Portree articulated their satisfaction of their local schools. As yet, the council is still to outline the educational benefits from their proposals for GME across the island. Such detail would assist stakeholders to be clearer on their school's GME curriculum and what parents may expect. Parents requested that there be increased promotion by the council of the benefits of GME. They felt that this is one way of encouraging more to choose GME for their children and help sustain GME provision in more rural areas. The availability of childcare facilities was also identified as a possible reason that parents may use a GME provision outwith their proposed catchment areas. The council should consider how they will consult parents on provision of early learning and childcare as a means of providing continuity in children's 3-12 education in their local GME provision.

3.6 The council's proposal paper states that Raasay Primary School has not been aligned with the proposed GME catchment areas due to excessive travelling distances for children. They do acknowledge that, should there be sufficient demand, they would meet the obligations described in the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. In the course of this statutory consultation, parents expressed an interest in increasing the Gaelic learning available to pupils at Raasay Primary School. Others have indicated that there may be a possible interest to access GME. We would ask the council to engage with the parents of Raasay Primary School to take forward, as appropriate, their interests in Gaelic.

4. Summary

The Highland Council's proposal to set catchment areas for GME has potential benefits for strengthening Gaelic within the Portree ASG. Almost all stakeholders support the proposal as formalising arrangements that are already in place. In doing so, they have identified reasonable concerns, that the council should take forward in finalising its report. This should include more detailed illustrations of the precise nature of GME catchment areas. The council's final consultation report needs to detail the educational benefits that will accrue from the proposal. These should assist in allaying parents' concerns that some GME provisions may be more attractive than others. It should be clear how the strategic leadership and curricula of all GME provisions referenced in the proposal paper will give due attention to securing high-quality outcomes for all pupils in GME. The council should continue to engage with the parents of Raasay Primary School in taking forward their interests in Gaelic. In its final report, the council should specify transition arrangements to include families who currently live outwith the proposed catchment area for the school to which they are currently sending their children and how they will guarantee places for any of their younger siblings.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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