



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

CARE AND LEARNING SERVICE

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A GAELIC MEDIUM CATCHMENT AREA FOR MOUNT PLEASANT PRIMARY SCHOOL

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal to establish a Gaelic Medium (GM) catchment area for Mount Pleasant Primary School.

Having had regard (in particular) to:

- Relevant written representations received by the Council (from any person) during the consultation period.
- Oral representations made to it (by any persons) at the public meeting held at Mount Pleasant Primary School on 25 June 2019.
- The report from Education Scotland.

This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

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Appendix A - The proposal document

Appendix B - Proposed GM catchment for Mount Pleasant Primary School

1.0 Background

1.1 Highland Council's Care, Learning and Housing Committee, at its meeting on 29 May 2019, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to establish a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Mount Pleasant Primary School.

1.2 The Proposal Paper suggested that the new catchment will overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of Mount Pleasant Primary School, Miller Academy Primary School, Pennyland Primary School, Castletown Primary School, Crossroads Primary School, Halkirk Primary School, and Reay Primary School. Particular arrangements would apply to school transport from the catchment areas of the schools outwith Thurso.

1.3 The Proposal Paper also suggested formalising the current arrangements relating to Gàidhlig Medium Education (GME) in Thurso High School, under which the catchment area for Thurso High School would apply to both Gàidhlig Medium and English Medium education.

1.4 **Appendix A** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendix B** is the appendix to the original proposal.

2.0 Consultation process

2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Tuesday 4 June 2019 to Friday 22 August 2019. Written representations on the proposal were sought from

interested parties as defined within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.

2.2 In accordance with statutory requirements, the following were consulted:

- (i) Parents of pupils attending Mount Pleasant Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (ii) Parents of pupils attending Castletown Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (iii) Parents of pupils attending Crossroads Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (iv) Parents of pupils attending Halkirk Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (v) Parents of pupils attending Miller Academy Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (vi) Parents of pupils attending Pennyland Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (vii) Parents of pupils attending Reay Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (viii) The Parent Councils of each of the above schools;
- (ix) All staff of the schools listed above;
- (x) Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal;
- (xi) Trade union representatives;
- (xii) All Community Councils for the areas covered by the Proposal;
- (xiii) Bòrd na Gàidhlig;
- (xiv) Education Scotland;
- (xvii) Highland Youth Convenor

2.3 The proposal document was advertised on the Highland Council website.

2.4 A public meeting was held at Mount Pleasant Primary School on 25 June 2019. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website and Facebook page and in the *John O'Groats Journal*.

2.5 Following receipt of written representations received by Highland Council and consideration of oral representations made at the public meeting, officials reviewed the proposals.

2.6 The outcome of this review process is reflected in the response, conclusion and recommendations outlined below.

3.0 Responses received

3.1 One written response was received during the formal consultation period, which came from Bòrd na Gàidhlig. A copy is at **Appendix 2**. The Bòrd welcomed the recommendation that a catchment area will be established for Mount Pleasant Primary School where there is GME provision, and noted that the Council has considered both reasonable travel distance and arrangements for

pupils and parents. The Bòrd expressed the view that the proposed catchment area for Thurso Primary School will support the availability and growth of GME.

- 3.2 The note of the public meeting is at **Appendix 3**. All of the questions raised were on future school transport arrangements for pupils accessing GME. These are addressed in Section 4 below.

4.0 Responses to the Issues raised at the Public Meeting

Issue 1

If a pupil was attending GME at Mount Pleasant Primary but then moved out of the GM catchment, would they still receive transport?

Response 1

See the discussion at Questions 1-4 of the Public Meeting on 25 June 2019 (Appendix 2).

The Highland Council's school transport policy is based on the principle of transport within defined catchment areas. The Council appreciates that in certain geographical areas the situation with GME is different, in that not every part of Highland is within a GME catchment area. Normally, pupils moving out of a school catchment would cease to be entitled to transport to that school, and this would be the default position. However, we propose that if requests of the type described are received, they would be considered if (a) the pupil had moved to a location outwith a GME catchment area or beyond reasonable travelling distance to alternative GME provision, and (b) the travel time and distance to Mount Pleasant school, and cost of provision, were considered reasonable. The Council will draw up guidance regarding how such requests should be assessed, and this will include consideration of how long the pupil has been in GME education and their stage in school. Parents who wish to dispute the assessment may ask for their case to be considered by the Educational Transport Entitlement Review Sub-Committee.

Issue 2

The Proposal Paper suggests that transport to GME at Mount Pleasant will be via the High School bus. How will that work when the primary school starts half an hour later than the secondary school each morning, or on Friday afternoons when the High School finishes at lunchtime?

Response 2

Transport would normally be provided by a High School bus. Our standard arrangements for school transport are that pupils are dropped at school no more than 20 minutes before the start of the school day and collected no more than 20 minutes after the end of the day (although officers may decide to vary this in particular cases). Running buses to Thurso High School and then to Mount Pleasant Primary should enable the 20-minute window to be

maintained, or a slight extension allowed (of no more than 5 minutes).

It is recognised that in some circumstances this would not be appropriate, for example where there are only one or two GME pupils and they are in the younger years of primary school. Routes will be planned according to the number of eligible pupils wishing to use them.

If practicable, and dependent on the number of pupils eligible for GME transport in any year, pupils may be allocated seats on English Medium primary school transport rather than on High School buses. Such transport might therefore serve two or all three of the Thurso primary schools.

Separate transport arrangements will be required on Friday afternoons, unless the primary school hours were to be changed.

5.0 Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland

- 5.1 In line with legislative requirements, Education Scotland was invited to submit comments on the Council's proposals. An English language copy of the report from Education Scotland is at **Appendix 4**. A Gaelic language copy of the report from Education Scotland is at **Appendix 5**.
- 5.2 In their report, Education Scotland noted that consultees agreed that it was useful that the proposal detailed some of the transport arrangements for children and young people accessing GME. Should the proposal be implemented, the Council needs to give more detail of the safe transporting of children to and from Mount Pleasant Primary School when starting and finishing times vary from that of Thurso High School. Education Scotland added that, at the present time, stakeholders' confidence is diminished due to the lack of clarity on how progression in GME will be advanced at the secondary stages. Parents requested that effective transition arrangements be put in place to support children's wellbeing and learning as they move from primary to secondary.
- 5.3 Education Scotland concluded the proposal has the potential to result in educational benefits to children attending GME. They added that consultees did have some justifiable concerns, which the council needs to address in its final report. These centre on promotion of GME, transport and taking forward 3-18 GME as a continuum of learning.
- 5.4 The issues raised by Education Scotland are addressed in Section 6 below.

6.0 Responses to the Issues raised by Education Scotland

Issue 3

The Council needs to give more detail of the safe transporting of children to and from Mount Pleasant Primary School when starting and finishing times vary from that of Thurso High School.

Response 3

See Response 2 above.

Issue 4

Effective transition arrangements should be put in place to support children's wellbeing and learning as they move from primary to secondary.

Response 4

Council officials and the local Head Teachers have been working together to provide appropriate staffing arrangements for those GM pupils moving up to Thurso High School from August 2020 onwards. Arrangements will be put in place which will be sustainable in the long term.

Issue 5

The educational benefit statement should more strategically capture how a 3-18 GME curriculum strengthens the rationale for drawing up catchment areas. This should fully involve parents and partners and be a shared narrative of how this proposal realises more detailed educational benefits for children and young people learning through Gaelic and English.

Response 5

The Proposal Paper advised that the proposal is being advanced because the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Medium Education requires local authorities to set up Gaelic Medium catchment areas.

Nevertheless, the setting up of the catchment areas will strengthen GME in the Thurso area by demonstrating the Council's commitment to providing GME within the Thurso ASG. Evidence of this commitment to the long-term provision of GME will help address drop-off rates and will make Gaelic a key part of choices for life for local children. It is acknowledged that bilingualism has educational benefits as it provides the user with a better sense of the structure of language, and bilingual children often find it easier to pick up other languages. The continued availability of Gaelic medium education in the Thurso ASG, as evidenced by the new catchment, will provide children with the opportunity to develop these skills for life.

7.0 Effects on the Community

7.1 The Proposal will not have any impact on the wider community.

8.0 Effects on School Transport

8.1 The proposal will clarify travel entitlement for children accessing GME in the Thurso Associated School Group, and provision will be made according to normal criteria.

9.0 Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

9.1 The proposal is not expected to have any impact on staff and school management arrangements.

10.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies

10.1 There were no alleged omissions or inaccuracies.

11.0 Overall Review of Consultation Exercise

11.1 The proposal attracted very little interest. No significant concerns were raised.

11.2 Highland Council has carefully considered all the views expressed in consultation. The Council's responses are set out above, and its conclusion is set out at Section 13 below.

12.0 Legal issues

12.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

13.0 Conclusion

13.1 The consultation process has complied fully with legislative requirements and has provided an opportunity for all parties to identify key issues of concern. These issues have been fully considered and the Council's response detailed in sections 4 and 6 above.

13.2 The Education Scotland Inspector visited Mount Pleasant Primary School and Thurso High School, to speak to parents, pupils and staff and gather a variety of views. Education Scotland also had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document, all written responses, and the note of the public meeting.

13.3 On reviewing all of the submissions, the note of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; officials conclude that the Proposal to create a GM catchment area for Mount Pleasant Primary School offers educational benefits and should be implemented. The GM catchment area should be the same as that set out in the Proposal Paper. The reasons for this conclusion are set out above.

14.0 Recommendation

14.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council proceeds with the course of action set out at Paragraph 13.3 above.

Brian Porter
Head of Resources, Care and Learning Service
12 November 2019