



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND LEARNING SERVICE

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

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal to establish a Gaelic Medium (GM) catchment area for Gairloch 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 Gairloch High School on 22 January 2020.
- The report from Education Scotland.

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

Following consideration of the responses received during consultation, the Council is proposing changes to the original Proposal. The detailed changes are set out at Responses 2 and 6, and Section 13, below.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 Highland Council's Care, Learning and Housing Committee, at its meeting on 5 December 2019, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to establish a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Gairloch Primary School.
- 1.2 The Proposal Paper suggested that the new catchment will overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of Gairloch Primary School, Poolewe Primary School, Bualnaluib Primary School, Kinlochewe Primary School, Shieldaig Primary School, and Torridon Primary School. Particular arrangements would apply to school transport from the areas outwith the Gairloch PS catchment.
- 1.3 The Proposal Paper also suggested formalising the current arrangements relating to Gàidhlig Medium Education (GME) in Gairloch High School, under which the catchment area for Gairloch 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 Monday 9 December 2019 to Friday 31 January 2020. 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 Gairloch Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
 - (ii) Parents of pupils attending Poolewe Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
 - (iii) Parents of pupils attending Bualnaluib Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
 - (iv) Parents of pupils attending Kinlochewe Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
 - (v) Parents of pupils attending Shieldaig Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
 - (vi) The Parent Councils of each of the above schools;
 - (vii) All staff of the schools listed above;
 - (viii) Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal;
 - (ix) Trade union representatives;
 - (x) All Community Councils for the areas covered by the Proposal;
 - (xi) Bòrd na Gàidhlig;
 - (xii) Education Scotland;
- 2.3 The proposal document was advertised on the Highland Council website.
- 2.4 A public meeting was held at Gairloch High School on 22 January 2020. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website and Facebook page and in the *Ross-shire Journal*. The note of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.
- 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. The timescale for the process was affected by the national measures taken to limit the COVID pandemic.
- 2.6 The outcome of this review process is reflected in the response, conclusion and recommendations outlined below.

3.0 Responses received

- 3.1 A list of those who responded in writing during the public consultation is at **Appendix 3**. There were 4 written responses received during the consultation period. Copies of these responses can also be found at **Appendices 3i-3iv**. All the responses were submitted on behalf of organisations (Comann nam Pàrant, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and two local community councils).

4.0 Issues raised during public consultation

- 4.1 The issues raised in writing during the consultation exercise are summarised below, together with the responses from the Council. Some of the responses have made the same or very similar arguments, and where this occurs the arguments have been grouped together and addressed only once.

Issue 1

The lack of provision of Gaelic as a second language in feeder primary schools was referred to at the public meeting on 22nd January. It is important that all pupils have the opportunity to study Gaelic as learners and encouraged to continue their learning at secondary.

That all the resources for GM are spent in Gairloch results in zero provision for Gaelic input for Bualnaluib Primary.

Very little consultation took place when the Gaelic medium started in Gairloch, it would have been much fairer for all to have mobile GM teachers visiting each of the primary schools regularly, leading to many more children growing up with Gaelic, creating a sense of shared culture rather than the division and inequity currently seen, with disparity only worsening as austerity measures seem to cut mainstream education harder.

It is with some hope that we learn resources are being allocated to training teachers and delivering L2 Gaelic, and I also appreciate this is in line with National policy but would like our views considered as part of the wider debate.

Response 1

The Council is working towards a situation where all the primary school children in the ASG would be able to do Learners' Gaelic, and then when they come into the High School there is a pathway there that will enable them to continue with learners' Gaelic, that they could continue up to certificate level.

There is a comprehensive programme underway in Highland to train staff in delivering Gaelic as a second language. There is ongoing training for staff to and a lot of work has gone into preparing materials. A lot of the material is online, so parents can access it as well.

Issue 2

The Highland Council has provided information on distance and travel time for each of the primary schools within the proposed catchment area. The Bòrd considers that these distances from Shieldaig and Torridon and times are not 'reasonable' for primary-age children. However, the Bòrd would not wish any pupils who currently travel to Bun-sgoil Gheàrrloch to be

disadvantaged and so recommend that the opportunity to enter GME is retained until alternative provision is available locally.

Response 2

Having considered this and other responses with similar comments, Highland Council will remove the Shieldaig and Torridon catchments from the proposed GM catchment for Gairloch Primary. In practical terms this is unlikely to affect any children, as at present no children from these catchments attend GME in Gairloch.

Issue 3

Bòrd na Gàidhlig are concerned that this proposal which, as claimed, 'helps to consolidate existing provision of GME' will deter parents from making a request for GME provision in their own school at a future date. We are also concerned that any such request would be less likely to have a positive outcome.

The Bòrd is further of the view that the proposal is contrary to the Guidance in that it reduces the opportunity to attract parents to choose GME provision for their children in their communities.

The suggestion that catchment areas will normally overlay a number of school catchment areas applies particularly to urban areas.

In the Bòrd's view the proposed catchment area for Gairloch Primary School would not support the availability and growth of GME.

Response 3

Highland Council is clear that the proposed GM catchment area for Gairloch Primary, if approved, would not preclude the setting up of more local provision, should demand for that be identified in future. Paragraph 1.22 of the Statutory Guidance on GME allows parents to request an assessment of the need for GMPE provision under the 2016 Act even where an education authority already has catchment areas in relation to existing GMPE. This provision was specifically highlighted on page 1 of the Proposal Paper (Appendix A)

The Statutory Guidance does not contain any advice to the effect that the principle of GM catchment areas overlaying a number of EM catchment areas applies particularly in urban areas. The lack of any such distinction has been noted in the Education Scotland report.

Issue 4

Given the distance to travel to Gairloch, [from Shieldaig, Torridon and Kinlochewe] it seems appropriate that families living on our side maintain the choice of attending either Gairloch or Lochcarron GM which is considerably closer, especially for children living in Shieldaig or round the Applecross Coast.

For young children living in outlying areas such as Diabaig or Arrina it would be a very early start to meet the morning bus which leaves after 7am and they would not return home till well after 5 pm.

There is a significant difference between infants travelling in a private car and on a larger bus for longer journeys without an escort where issues such as toilets or travel sickness could arise so there would need to be someone identified to be able to help if needed.

Senior pupils can find the daily journey tiring so this could also have a potential impact on young ones.

Anyone in Achnasheen would also be closer to Lochcarron.

Response 4

Although it is suggested that parents “maintain the choice” of attending GME at either Gairloch or Lochcarron, such a choice does not exist at present.

Highland Council’s enrolment scheme is based on the principle of a designated school for each address in Highland. The designated school for a particular address could be different depending on whether a pupil is accessing GME or not, but we would not propose to place a single address in more than GM catchment area.

It is true that Shieldaig itself is closer to Plockton than it is to Gairloch. However, pupils from Shieldaig transfer to Gairloch for secondary education, and any changes to that arrangement would itself require statutory consultation.

Issue 5

It may be easier for families living in Kinlochewe to travel to Gairloch on the bus though this could also impact on the already fragile number of pupils in our small schools.

Maintaining the status quo not only deprives the pupils of equity of educational provision, but additionally leaves the school short of pupils who are bused to Gairloch for Gaelic medium. This can in certain circumstances have severe consequences by reducing the hours of teaching provision locally at huge detriment to the wellbeing and education of staff and pupils. It

only requires a minimal dip in numbers to lose half a teacher, thus one family choosing Gaelic education for their children can have an impact on the whole of Bualnaluib primary with a knock-on effect for the community.

Response 5

The Council recognises the concerns within communities such as Bualnaluib, Poolewe and Kinlochewe about declining school rolls. In putting forward this Proposal, the Council has sought to strike a balance. The catchment area is being proposed in accordance with the Statutory Guidance, and the Council is seeking to encourage GME. We want to sustain our small schools, but we also have a statutory duty to promote and support GME. Ultimately this will be a matter of parental choice.

Although at the present time Gairloch PS is the only school in the ASG that offers Gaelic Medium education, parents of children under school age, and who have not yet started to attend a primary school, have a right to request an assessment of the need for Gaelic Medium Primary Education (GMPE) from the education authority in whose area their child lives. When an education authority receives a parental request for GMPE, the education authority must assess the need for GMPE. This remains the case even where an education authority already has a catchment area in relation to existing GMPE provision. The situation is not necessarily one of “all of nothing.”

- 4.2 The note of the public meeting is at Appendix 2. Seventeen questions were raised and were answered during the meeting. Most covered issues that were also raised in the written responses and are addressed above. The Council did give a commitment to clarify the transport proposals set out in the Proposal Paper. This is addressed at Section 8 below.

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 is at **Appendix 5**.
- 5.2 In their report, Education Scotland noted that the proposal demonstrates The Highland Council’s continued commitment to implementing the statutory Guidance for Gaelic Education. It assists the Council in clarifying transport arrangements for children attending Gaelic Medium Education and in pursuing its duty to provide best value. Almost all consultees supported the council in establishing a catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education. However, Education Scotland also identified a few issues and concerns arising from the consultation that merit further consideration.
- 5.3 Some of the schools affected by this consultation are in very remote rural areas. The schools have very small pupil rolls, and it was noted that some consultees are concerned that the option of Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary

School will adversely impact on the future of local schools. These consultees argued that one solution would be for all children to learn Gaelic as an additional language as part of the curriculum. This, they think, would keep children attending their local schools. HM Inspectors agree with the council, that should parents who reside within the proposed catchment area request access to Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary School, that that should be made available. They advised that, should the proposal be adopted, the council needs to be clearer that Gaelic Learner and Medium Education are both valuable learning pathways. However, the Council should take account of evidence that immersion brings children to fluency more quickly.

- 5.4 Education Scotland noted that a number of consultees expressed concern about some of the proposed distances that children were expected to travel to access Gaelic Medium Education. They recommend the council keep demand for Gaelic Medium Education in the area under review, and engage with parents and others in ascertaining whether further Gaelic Medium Education provision could be put into place. Several responses highlighted that children residing in the catchment area of Shieldaig Primary School are considerably closer to Lochcarron Primary School than Gairloch Primary School. Gaelic Medium Education is available at Lochcarron Primary School, but it does not fall within the associated school group of Gairloch High School. The distance between Shieldaig Primary School and Lochcarron Primary School falls within the council's reasonable distance to travel. The council should do some further work to ascertain the impact that this may have on educational benefits for children. Their further investigation should include a focus on the impact for children in accessing early learning and childcare and secondary education through the medium of Gaelic. The council's final report should be clear on the resulting educational benefits of their final decision. Once a decision has been made on this, the council may need to revisit section 6.11 of their proposal paper which highlights that the Gairloch High School catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education is the same area that currently exists.
- 5.5 Education Scotland conclude that the catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary School should overlay that of Bualnaluib, Gairloch, Kinlochewe and Poolewe Primary Schools. The council should define further how they will address children's safety while travelling on buses. They further conclude it is a reasonable request that the council investigate whether children who reside in the catchment area of Shieldaig Primary School should have the option of accessing Gaelic Medium Education at Lochcarron Primary School. It is HM Inspectors' view that the shorter travelling distances may be beneficial in accessing Gaelic Medium Education at the primary stages. It is important that the council's final decision takes account of the statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education to 'attract parents to choose Gaelic Medium Education for their children'. The council needs to continue to engage with all stakeholders, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in addressing the concerns outlined in section three of this report.
- 5.6 The issues raised by Education Scotland are addressed in Section 6 below.

6.0 Responses to the Issues raised by Education Scotland

Issue 6

The catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary School should overlay that of Bualnaluib, Gairloch, Kinlochewe and Poolewe Primary Schools.

Response 6

Having considered the various responses to the consultation exercise, the Council accepts the above suggestion.

Issue 7

The council should define further how they will address children's safety while travelling on buses.

Response 7

A number of primary and secondary school transport routes are combined with public bus services across THC area, and this has been the case for many years. Although parents are often apprehensive when such arrangements are planned, generally there are very few issues in practice. The Council allows but does not require operators to register their services as public service routes to enhance transport provision in the area, provided they ensure there is enough seating capacity with seatbelts for every entitled pupil.

In order to make travelling on high school buses safer for primary age pupils, we can assign specific seats in the front of the bus to be reserved for primary pupils. Also the High School could nominate bus monitors, and we would encourage this. Monitors would be responsible for ensuring everyone was travelling safely in their seats with their seatbelts on and in return could be issued with onward travel elsewhere (depending on the contractor) or perhaps some other incentives at school. They would be responsible for reporting any issues with the vehicle or route as well as reporting on behaviour of passengers.

Issue 8

The council should investigate whether children who reside in the catchment area of Shieldaig Primary School should have the option of accessing Gaelic Medium Education at Lochcarron Primary School. It is HM Inspectors' view that the shorter travelling distances may be beneficial in accessing Gaelic Medium Education at the primary stages.

The council should do some further work to ascertain the impact that this may have on educational benefits for children. Their further investigation should include a focus on the impact for children in accessing early learning and

childcare and secondary education through the medium of Gaelic. The council's final report should be clear on the resulting educational benefits of their final decision.

Response 8

See Response 4 above. The Shieldaig PS catchment is part of the Gairloch Associated School Group (ASG), whilst the Lochcarron PS catchment is part of the Plockton ASG. If children from Shieldaig were to attend Lochcarron for GME, this would imply a transfer to Plockton High School rather than Gairloch High School. Highland Council does not think this would assist with community cohesion within Shieldaig.

Were there to be future demand for GME within the community of Shieldaig, then on balance Highland Council believes this would best be met locally.

Issue 9

The Council needs to continue to engage with all stakeholders, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in addressing the concerns outlined in the Education Scotland Report.

Response 9

The Council has continued to engage with Bòrd na Gàidhlig, at official level, to address the issues raised by Education Scotland. The Bòrd have been informally advised of the changes to the Proposal following the outcome of the consultation exercise. They are reassured by the Council's awareness of Paragraphs 1.22 and 1.23 of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, as well as its willingness to assess any future requests for GMPE from within the Gairloch ASG in accordance with the 2016 Act and the Statutory Guidance.

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 Since the GM provision at Gairloch Primary is co-located with Gairloch High School, travel arrangements are already in place for journeys to the designated GM provision. The proposal will clarify entitlement to this travel.

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 majority of the responses received expressed concern about the size of the proposed GM catchment area. The Council has responded to the above by reducing the size of the proposed catchment, as set out at Responses 2 and 6 above, and in the conclusion 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 Gairloch Primary 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 Gairloch Primary School offers educational benefits and should be implemented, but with a reduced catchment area from that set out in the Proposal Paper. The revised GM catchment area for Gairloch PS should overlay the current EM catchments for Gairloch PS, Poolewe PS, Bualnaluib PS, and Kinlochewe PS. Particular arrangements for school transport will apply to any pupils attending GME from outwith the Gairloch PS catchment itself.

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, Education and Learning Service
16 November 2020