

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to establish a Gàidhlig (Gaelic) Medium catchment area (applying to both primary and secondary school education) for Craighill Primary School (soon to be part of the Tain 3-18 campus).

March 2025

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#) ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of a proposal by The Highland Council to establish a Gàidhlig Medium catchment area. This will apply to both primary and secondary school education for Craighill Primary School and Tain Royal Academy. 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' view. On receipt of this report, the 2010 Act requires the council to consider it alongside any relevant considerations the council received and then prepare its consultation report. The council's consultation report should include 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 consultation report at least three weeks before it takes its final decision. With all proposals, the council needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools; 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 meeting held on 11 February 2025 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; and
- visits to the site of Bun-sgoil Cnoc na Creige - Craighill Primary School and Acadamaidh Rìoghail Bhaile Dhubhthaich - Tain Royal Academy, including discussion 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](#).

2.2 The formal consultation ran from 20 January to 7 March 2025. The proposal, if it progresses, will apply to both primary and secondary school education for Bun-sgoil Cnoc na Creige - Craighill Primary School and Acadamaidh Rìoghail Bhaile Dhubhthaich - Tain Royal Academy. These schools are soon to be part of the Tain 3-18 campus. The new catchment will be the same for primary and secondary purposes. They will overlay the English Medium catchments of the schools in the Tain, Dornoch and Invergordon associated school group catchments. This

represents a total of 14 primary schools and 3 secondary schools. The proposal paper was distributed to staff, Parent Councils and parents of pupils attending the schools detailed within the proposal paper. It was also sent to members of the United Kingdom and Scottish Parliaments, trade unions, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Comann nam Pàrant and community councils. A notice was placed in local press. Information was available on the council's website and on social media.

2.3 The council hosted a public meeting on 11 February 2025 where officers set a rationale for the proposals, discussed high-level educational benefits and invited attendee views. There were 18 people in attendance, including 13 members of the public and five members of The Highland Council staff. Attendees raised questions on the geographical area of the catchment. Almost all expressed a strong preference that the catchment be extended more widely to include schools within the Golspie area of Sutherland. They felt that this would ensure equity of access to Gàidhlig Medium Education in areas where it is not currently offered. This includes the area surrounding Bonar Bridge where Gàidhlig provision is currently mothballed. Attendees raised queries on how effectively the council promote Gàidhlig Medium Education, including at registration to start school. A few attendees raised the need for availability of a meaningful proportion of the secondary curriculum through the medium of Gàidhlig. They also expressed concern about the availability and suitability of school transport and how this may, in some cases, be prohibitive to children attending Gàidhlig Medium Education. Ten written responses were received. Almost all of these raised similar issues to those aired at the public meeting. Both Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Comann nam Pàrant expressed support for the proposal to establish a catchment area for Gàidhlig Medium Education, noting concerns about the geographical extent of the catchment.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 This proposal demonstrates The Highland Council's continued commitment to implementing the statutory Guidance for Gaelic Education, 2017 and their Gàidhlig Language Plan. The council detail their commitment to continue increasing the speakers of Gàidhlig, who also accrue all the benefits of bilingualism. The council feel that drawing up catchment areas clarifies for parents how they access Gàidhlig Medium Education. HM Inspectors agree that there are benefits to most of what the council is proposing. However, the council still need to take important actions to improve further the potential educational benefits resulting from their proposal.

3.2 The council is proposing catchment areas for Gàidhlig Medium Education at Bun-sgoil Cnoc na Creige - Craighill Primary School and Acadamaidh Rìoghail Bhaile Dhubhthaich - Tain Royal Academy (soon to be part of Tain campus 3-18). These will overlay the catchment areas of all primary schools associated with Tain Royal Academy, depending on the results of the consultation. The proposal also includes Invergordon and Dornoch secondary schools and associated primary schools. Approximately half of the pupils attending Gàidhlig Medium Education in P1-7 at present are from the town of Tain. The remainder are drawn from a wide range of locations in the Cromarty Firth and Dornoch Firth areas, as well as from further afield. Within the consultation report, the council should ensure clarity for transport provision for children and young people to allow them to attend Gàidhlig Medium Education from the Invergordon and Dornoch areas. HM Inspectors agree that the catchment area for Gàidhlig Medium Education should be extended to include the Golspie area of Sutherland. This would promote equitable access to Gàidhlig Medium Education to more children and young people where local provision is not currently available. The Highland Council should also confirm how they will use the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 to meet future requests and grow more local provision by adding Gàidhlig Medium Education classes to existing provision, as well as the need for all Gàidhlig schools.

3.3 There are far fewer schools that offer Gàidhlig Medium Education rather than English Medium. This necessitates more travel for children and young people accessing Gàidhlig Medium Education. A significant stakeholder concern is the appropriateness of school transport with shared arrangements for young children and secondary school pupils. Should the council extend the catchment area from that detailed in the proposal, they should ensure transport, travel and cost are not barriers to parents choosing Gàidhlig Medium Education. Children and young people, in accessing Gàidhlig Medium Education, need to experience excellence, equity, equality and fairness. The council should ensure that relevant impact assessments are undertaken, including equality and rural assessments. They should detail safeguarding arrangements for young children travelling on transport.

3.4 The educational benefits statement proposes that the establishment of catchment demonstrates the commitment of The Highland Council to Gàidhlig Medium Education. The setting of a catchment area will help young people see how they can remain in Gàidhlig Medium Education as a continuous experience for their time in statutory education. A significant consideration to support continuation of study in Gàidhlig is access to a quality, consistent and equitable 3-18 curriculum that supports high levels of fluency in Gàidhlig. The educational benefit statement should expand further on the curricular benefits of the proposal. It would be helpful to specify how the proposal will help the council meet the targets they have set out as statutory in their Gàidhlig language planning for a 3-18 immersion curriculum. These duties are specified in the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017. The council's educational benefits statement acknowledges the benefits of bilingualism. The availability of Gàidhlig Medium Education within associated school groups will provide children and young people with opportunities to develop these skills for life. HM Inspectors reported on the strong immersion experiences at Bun-sgoil Cnoc na Creige - Craighill Primary School in September 2023. The council should detail further how they will maintain high quality immersion experiences in the new Tain 3-18 campus.

3.5 Bòrd na Gàidhlig is a statutory consultee for changes to arrangements for Gàidhlig Medium Education. They welcome that a catchment area is being proposed for Gàidhlig Medium Education and note the concerns from parents about the limited geographical extent of the catchment. Comann nam Pàrant welcome that the proposal enacts legislation. They agree that the catchment should be extended to include schools in the Golspie area and that parents should decide if travel distance is reasonable for their child. They also noted that the council should be responsive to parental requests for future expansion within local areas and that the availability and appropriateness of school transport should not be a barrier to children attending Gàidhlig Medium education.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that the council's proposal is of educational benefit to children and parents who reside within the catchment areas for Craighill Primary School and Tain Royal Academy (soon to be the Tain 3-18 campus). There are also educational benefits for children within the Invergordon and Dornoch areas. The proposal gives clarity to parents on how to access Gàidhlig Medium Education and a catchment area should be established, subject to the actions that we recommend in Section 3 of this report. Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors support the proposal, should the catchment be extended to include a wider geographical area. They also expressed their pride in and success in developing fluency in Gàidhlig and are clear about the benefits of bilingualism. HM Inspectors agree with stakeholders that the catchment area should be extended to ensure Gàidhlig Medium Education is accessible to as many children as possible. In taking forward the proposal, the council should continue working with stakeholders to ensure and resource high-quality 3-18 Gàidhlig Medium Education curriculum and immersion

environments in the existing and new Gàidhlig Medium establishments. There are omissions in the proposal regarding transport arrangements for children and young people from Invergordon and Dornoch. It will be important that the council provide transport arrangements that are safe, feasible, long-term and attractive to realise the educational benefits of the proposal.

HM Inspectors
March 2025