

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

The proposal is to establish a 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).

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS STATEMENT

THIS IS A PROPOSAL PAPER PREPARED IN TERMS OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY'S AGREED PROCEDURE TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010

INTRODUCTION

The Highland Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process:

- To establish Gàidhlig Medium (GM) catchment areas for Craighill Primary School/the Tain 3-18 campus. The new catchment will be the same for primary and secondary purposes, and will overlay the English Medium (EM) catchments of the schools in the Tain, Dornoch and Invergordon ASGs catchments. This represents a total of 14 primary schools (at the time of writing) as well as the 3 secondary schools. Particular arrangements will apply for transport to Tain from the other EM catchment areas, and the proposal incorporates some continuing legacy arrangements.

Existing primary school catchments for the provision of English Medium education will be unaffected.

Highland Council is making this Proposal to comply with Statutory Guidance issued by Bòrd na Gàidhlig under Section 9 of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. Part 1 of the Statutory Guidance specifically relates to the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 and the duty placed on education authorities to promote and support Gaelic education. The Guidance includes a specific requirement on local authorities to create GM catchment areas for schools that offer GME.

The proposed changes, if approved, will be implemented at the conclusion of the statutory consultation process.

Any identified parental demand for future local provision of GME from within any of the primary schools identified above, would be assessed in accordance with the

Education (Scotland) Act 2016 and the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education (2017).

SUMMARY OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

Proposal Paper Published

The proposal paper will be available for inspection, free of charge, at:

- Tain Royal Academy
- Craighill Primary School
- Edderton Primary School
- Gledfield Primary School
- Hill of Fearn Primary School
- Hilton of Cadboll Primary School
- Inver Primary School
- Knockbreck Primary School
- Tarbat Old Primary School
- Invergordon Academy
- Milton Primary School
- Newmore Primary School
- Park Primary School
- South Lodge Primary School
- Dornoch Primary School
- Bonar Bridge Primary School
- Bonar Bridge Library
- Dornoch Library
- Invergordon Library
- Tain Library

and published on the Highland Council website:

www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

Copies of this Proposal Paper are also available on request from:

Business Support Team

Education Service

County Buildings

High Street

Dingwall

IV159QN

E-mail: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

To request this information in an alternative format, e.g. large print, Braille, audio formats, or suitable language, please also contact the Business Support Team, Education Service, County Buildings, High Street, Dingwall, IV15 9QN,

E-mail: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

Formal notice of the Proposal and relevant information will be given and be made available, free of charge, to the consultees listed as follows:

- (i) Parents of pupils attending all of the schools listed above, including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (ii) The Parent Councils of each of the above schools.
- (iii) All staff of the schools listed above.
- (iv) Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
- (v) Trade union representatives.
- (vi) All Community Councils for the areas covered by the Proposal.
- (vii) Bòrd na Gàidhlig.
- (viii) Comann nam Pàrant.
- (ix) Education Scotland.

Advertisement in Local Media

Notices announcing the public meetings will be placed in the *Northern Times*, and that *Ross-shire Journal*, as well as on the Highland Council's website and Facebook page.

Consultation Period

The consultation for this Proposal will run from 20 January 2025 and will end on 7 March 2025. This period allows for the statutory minimum of six weeks, including at least thirty school days.

Public Meetings

A public meeting will be held, the detail of which are set out below:

Craighill Primary School – 11 February 2025, 6.30pm

Anyone wishing to attend the public meetings is invited to do so. The meetings will be convened by the Council, will be chaired by a senior elected councillor, and will be addressed by officers of the Education Service. Electronic invitations will be sent to all statutory consultees.

The meeting will provide opportunities for the public to hear more about the proposal; to ask questions about the proposal; and to have the views of all stakeholders recorded so that they can be taken into account. A note will be taken of questions asked and views expressed. The note will be published on the Council website. The meeting may be recorded.

The note will be forwarded to Education Scotland, along with other submissions and comments received by the Council during the consultation process.

Responses to the Proposals

Interested parties are invited to respond to the Proposals by making written or electronic submissions on the Proposals to:

Business Support Team

Education Service

County Buildings

High Street

Dingwall

IV159QN

Email: Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk

Or via an online form, a link to which can be found on

www.highland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

When responding, you are invited to state your relationship with the school – for example, “pupil”, “parent”, “carer”, “relative”, “former pupil”, “teacher in school”, “member of the community” etc. However it is not compulsory to do so.

Those sending in a response, whether by letter or electronically should know that their response will be open to public scrutiny and may have to be supplied to anyone making a reasonable request to see it. If they do not wish their response to be made

publicly available, they should clearly write on the document: “I wish my response to be considered as confidential with access restricted to Councillors and Council Officers of Highland Council”. Otherwise, it will be assumed that the person making the response agrees to it being made publicly available. All written responses must be received by the last day of the consultation period, 7 March 2025 at 5.00pm.

Involvement of Education Scotland

When the Proposal Document is published, a copy will also be sent to Education Scotland by the Council. Education Scotland will also be sent, by 17 March 2025, a copy of any relevant written representations that are received by the Council from any person during the consultation period. Education Scotland will also receive summary notes of the public meetings that will be held and so far as is practicable a copy of any other relevant documentation. Education Scotland will then prepare a report on the educational aspects of the proposal not later than 4 April 2025. In preparing their report, Education Scotland may visit the affected schools and make such enquiries of people there as they consider appropriate.

Review of Consultation Exercise

Highland Council will review the proposal having regard to the Education Scotland Report, written representations that it has received, and oral representations made at the public meetings. It will then prepare a Consultation Report. This Report will be published in electronic and printed formats and will be sent to anyone who submitted a written representation during consultation. It will be available on the Council website as well as at the affected school and local library, free of charge. The Report will include a summary of the written and oral representations made during consultation and a copy of the Education Scotland Report, together with the Council’s considered response to the issues raised. The Report will include details of details of any alleged inaccuracies and/or omissions and how these have been handled. The Consultation Report will be published at least 3 weeks prior to being submitted to the Council’s Education Committee, who will make a recommendation to the full Highland Council.

In publishing the report the Council will invite any person or party to make further representations to the Committee prior to its meeting. A notice to this effect will also be published on the Highland Council website.

The Council intends to publish its Report in October 2025 prior to submission to the Council’s Education Committee in November 2025. However, this timescale may change depending on the nature of issues raised during consultation, and the need to give full consideration to those issues. In the latter event, the Report may not be submitted until a later Committee meeting.

Any proposal approved by the Education Committee would require to be confirmed by a subsequent meeting of the full Highland Council.

Note on Corrections

If any inaccuracy or omission is discovered in this Proposal Paper, either by the Council or any other person, the Council will determine if relevant information has been omitted or, if the paper contains an inaccuracy. The Council will then take appropriate action, which may include the issue of a correction or the reissuing of the Proposal or the revision of the timescale for the consultation period, if appropriate. In that event, relevant consultees and HMI will be advised.

PROPOSAL

Legislative Background

- 1.1 The proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education (S.1 of the Education Act 1980); to publish or otherwise make available information as to their arrangements for the placing of children in schools under their management (S.28 of the 1980 Act) and to promote and support Gaelic Medium education and learning (S.15 of The Education (Scotland) Act 2016. Statutory Guidance issued by Bòrd na Gàidhlig in 2017 specifies that local authorities should establish catchment areas for Gàidhlig Medium education, and the Council must comply with this Guidance. A catchment area for GME provision should be an area in which the education authority thinks it is reasonable for pupils wishing to receive GME provision to travel to school, and should have the potential to attract parents to choose GME provision for their children. Catchment areas for GME will normally overlay a number of school catchment areas.
- 1.2 In common with all public bodies in Scotland, the Highland Council also has a duty to provide Best Value. This includes making arrangements to secure continuous improvement in performance whilst maintaining an appropriate balance between quality and cost; and, in making those arrangements and securing that balance, to have regard to economy, efficiency, effectiveness, equal opportunities requirements and to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Reason for the Proposal

- 2.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
 - Bòrd na Gàidhlig has issued statutory guidance recommending that local authorities create catchment areas for GME.
 - Highland Council has not previously specified catchment areas for all of its schools offering GME. This has led to a lack of clarity for parents in respect of entitlement to GME (see paragraph 2.2 below).
- 2.2 Outwith our defined GM catchments, the criteria for providing transport to GME in Highland are not particularly well defined, and have evolved over time. The minimum distance and road safety criteria are the same as for English Medium education. The Council currently has an informal arrangement under which transport to GME can be provided “within

reasonable travelling distance”. This has been generally interpreted as meaning up to 15 miles, but there are numerous variations.

Informal Consultation

- 3.1 Advance notification of the proposal has been provided to local elected councillors representing the wards in which the schools are located, as well as with the Head Teachers of the schools directly affected. Contact was also made with the Parent Councils of the affected schools. An explanation of the Proposal was provided and comments were invited.
- 3.2 There is no compulsion on pupils from any other catchment to attend GME. The catchment proposal merely seeks to clarify the opportunity to do so.

Current and Planned Provision of Gàidhlig Medium Education within the Tain, Invergordon, Dornoch and Golspie ASGs

- 4.1 There are 8 primary schools within the Tain ASG, although that figure includes the current Craighill and Knockbreck Primary Schools, which are due to be merged as part of the new 3-18 campus. Craighill Primary is the only one to offer GME at the primary stage. Tain Royal Academy also offers GME.
- 4.2 There are 4 primary schools within the Invergordon ASG, none of which offer GME at present.
- 4.3 There are 2 primary schools within the Dornoch ASG. Bonar Bridge PS formerly offered GME, but this provision was “mothballed” around a decade ago.
- 4.4 The Gaelic medium class at Bonar Bridge PS was mothballed during school session 2015-16 when the GM roll fell to one, and the parents of the one remaining pupil asked that he transfer to Craighill PS to continue to access GME. Consequently, no children have attended GME at the school since 2016.
- 4.5 For the purposes of the current exercise, the Bonar Bridge PS catchment has been included within the proposed GM catchment for Craighill PS/new Tain Primary. Should the mothballed GM provision at re-open due to increased demand, the GM catchment for Tain would require to be amended, and new GM catchment published for Bonar Bridge Primary School.

Craighill Primary School

- 5.1 The school’s official roll for the 2024-25 session is 56 pupils across P1-7 in Gàidhlig Medium and 137 pupils across P1-7 in English Medium. There are also 22 children in Sgoil-àraich (Gàidhlig Medium pre-school nursery).

- 5.2 Approximately half of the GM pupils 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. There are currently 3 Gaelic Medium classes and a further 7 mainstream English Medium classes in the school.

The school is due to be replaced by a new merged primary school with effect from August 2025. The new GM catchment will apply to the new merged primary school.

Tain Royal Academy

- 6.1 For the 2023-24 school session, 19 pupils attending Tain Royal Academy are studying Gàidhlig for fluent speakers. The total roll of Tain Royal Academy for the 2024-25 school session is 511 pupils.

Proposed School Catchments for GME

- 7.1 Approximate travel distances and times to Tain from the other schools in the affected ASGs are set out below:

Tain Campus – Edderton Primary – 5.7 miles, 8 minutes travel time.

Tain Campus – Gledfield Primary – 14.8 miles, 21 minutes travel time.

Tain Campus – Hill of Fearn Primary – 5.3 miles, 8 minutes travel time.

Tain Campus – Hilton of Cadboll Primary – 7.9 miles, 12 minutes travel time.

Tain Campus – Inver Primary – 6.2 miles, 11 minutes travel time.

Tain Campus – Tarbat Old Primary – 10.1 miles, 17 minutes travel time.

Tain Campus – Milton Primary – 7 miles, 11 minutes travel time.

Tain Campus – Newmore Primary – 11.5 miles, 15 minutes travel time.

Tain Campus – Park Primary/Invergordon Academy – 12.9 miles, 18 minutes travel time.

Tain Campus – South Lodge Primary – 12.3 miles, 16 minutes travel time.

Tain Campus - Bonar Bridge Primary – 15.5 miles, 23 minutes travel time.

Tain Campus – Dornoch Academy/Primary – 8.5 miles, 12 minutes travel time.

- 7.2 The statutory guidance specifies that a catchment area for GME provision should be an area in which the education authority thinks it is reasonable for pupils wishing to receive GME provision to travel to school, and should have the potential to attract parents to choose GME provision for their children.

- 7.3 The Council is sympathetic to the idea that Gàidhlig Medium Education should be accessible as many pupils Highland as possible, provided it is practical and reasonable to provide access.
- 7.4 In line with the criteria set out above, the Council therefore proposes that the GM catchment for the Tain Campus will overlay the English Medium catchments of the schools in the Tain, Dornoch and Invergordon ASGs
- 7.5 In considering the principles of Best Value – see paragraph 1.2 above - Highland Council has noted that to provide dedicated transport from the areas outwith Tain, but within the proposed GM catchment, could result in an unacceptably high level of additional cost to the taxpayer.
- 7.6 The Council therefore proposes that school transport to GME at Tain Campus will be on the basis of utilising the existing transport for Tain Royal Academy, wherever it is practicable to do so. Dedicated transport by taxi or minibus will not normally be provided.
- 7.7 The map at **Appendix B** shows the proposed GM catchment for Tain Campus with the existing EM catchments outlined in red.
- 7.8 No changes are proposed for these catchments in respect of English Medium education.
- 7.9 Lairg Primary is located 25.7 miles from Craighill Primary, approximately 35 minutes in travel time. The travel distances involved will be too long for most primary school pupils, and taking this into account, the Council does not propose to include the Lairg PS catchment within the GM catchment of Craighill PS/Tain Campus. There are however some pupils currently accessing GME from Invershin, which lies between Lairg and Tain, but within the Lairg catchment. The Council will continue to provide transport to Tain for these pupils, until they complete their school attendance (secondary and primary) and provided they continue to access GME. This would also apply to any younger siblings of the affected pupils.

Educational Benefits – Catchment Areas

- 8.1 The Proposal forms part of Highland Council's overall approach to the promotion of Gàidhlig medium education. Up to now, Highland Council's admission arrangements to GME have been informal and based on a "reasonable distance" (often applied as a 15-mile radius) from each school offering GME. In some locations these radii have overlapped, and the "15 mile" principle has not always been applied consistently. The creation of GM catchment areas, extended throughout Highland, will mean that admissions to GME will in future be more formal and robust.

- 8.2 The Proposal therefore helps to consolidate our existing provision of GME and allows for the more efficient use of resources. It should be considered alongside other measures being undertaken to promote Gaelic and the benefits of bilingualism.
- 8.3 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 schools within the relevant ASGs, as evidenced by the new catchments, will provide children with the opportunity to develop these skills for life.
- 8.4 The creation of GM catchment areas will demonstrate the Council's commitment to the long-term future of Gaelic Medium education. Evidence of this commitment may help with the known problem with "drop-out" from GME.
- 8.5 The Education section of the Council's Gaelic Language Plan sets out the following aims:
- That the Highland Council increases the percentage of pupils in GME from potential enrolment figures at key transition points.
 - That the Highland Council increases the percentage of pupils undertaking Gaelic through the Primary Language Learning programme, based on the 1+2 Language Learning Approach and subsequently through secondary Gaelic Learner Education across The Highland Council area.
 - That the Highland Council creates a Gaelic education transitions strategy for retaining children in 0–3/childcare to nursery, nursery to primary, primary to secondary 1, and the Broad General Education to senior phase.
 - That the Highland Council develops a curriculum and workforce plan for the delivery of Gaelic education at all levels (0–3, nursery, primary and secondary) including clear signposting to www.teagasg.com and early years' recruitment via The Highland Council's website.
 - That the Highland Council undertakes a Highland-wide survey of existing Gaelic education staff to identify career-long professional learning needs, particularly in relation to Gaelic language skills, and develops a programme of training and support.
 - That the Highland Council ensures that Gaelic education is considered as part of the school estates capital development whenever possible.
- 8.6 The Proposal will raise the profile of Gaelic in the area and make it clear that the opportunity exists for children in the other primary school catchments to attend GME at Tain Campus

Effects on School Transport – Catchment Areas

- 9.1 Pupils attending GME are offered school transport on the same basis as children attending English Medium education. Paragraphs 7.6, 7.9, and 10.3 above provide more details of how the Council proposes to provide school transport in the case of the schools featured in this Proposal.
- 9.2 Currently, there are pupils accessing GME at Craighill Primary, who receive transport but whose homes are outwith the newly defined catchments. Where pupils had enrolled in school prior to the creation of the GM catchments, and where they were already in receipt of school transport, the Council will continue to provide it. School transport will also be provided to any younger siblings of such pupils, provided their older siblings are still at the same school.

Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

- 10.1 The Proposal is expected to have any direct effect on staff and management arrangements.

Effect on the Local Communities

- 11.1 The proposal is expected to have any impact on the wider local communities.

Integrated Impact Assessment

- 12.1 The proposal has been assessed as having no significant impacts on i. Equalities and Human Rights, ii. Children's Health and Wellbeing, iii. Data Handling, iv, Island and Rural Mainland Communities, and v. Climate Change.
- 12.2 In respect of age equality, the proposal relates to a primary school and as such primarily affects children in the 3-12 age group, and their parents. The proposal is advanced on the basis of educational benefit to the children in the area concerned. No negative age-related effects arise. Age is not a protected characteristic for the purposes of school provision.
- 12.3 The Proposal helps clarify access to Gàidhlig Medium education, and as such complies with the Council's principles of treating Gàidhlig on an equal basis with English.

Recommendation

- 13.1 Highland Council recommends the adoption of Gàidhlig Medium catchment areas for Craighill Primary School/the Tain 3-18 campus, along the lines set out in this paper.
- 13.2 This consultation paper is issued in terms of the authority's procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation period, a

report and submissions received will be presented to the Education Committee of the Highland Council.

END OF PROPOSAL PAPER