

Agenda Item	7
Report No	G/13/26

The Highland Council

Committee: Gaelic

Date: 26 August 2026

Report Title: Gaelic Education Update

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive - People

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report provides Members with an update on three key areas of Gaelic and education development across Highland.

The report provides information on the recent HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspection outcome for Mallaig Early Learning and Childcare Sgoil-àraich (ELC), highlighting the strengths identified by inspectors.

The report also provides a high-level overview of Highland Council's current position in relation to Language Learning in Scotland (1+2 Languages) within the national context, reflecting the Council's commitment growing Gaelic learner pathways.

Finally, the report updates Members on progress against the strategic outcomes contained within The Highland Council's Gaelic Language Plan (GLP) by supporting the wider growth and sustainability of Gaelic across Highland in the North and Lochaline.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the:

- i. positive outcome of the HMIE inspection of Mallaig Sgoil àraich, recognising the strengths identified and the contribution of the setting to Gaelic Medium Early Learning and Childcare provision within Highland;
- ii. progress of Highland Council's current performance in relation to L2 and L3 language learning, including progress against national expectations and the ongoing work to support language learning across schools; and
- iii. continued growth in Gaelic Education across Highland and the importance of sustaining capacity to meet future demand.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

For the 2026/27 financial year, the Council submitted a Gaelic Specific Grant (GSG) application of £1.379M and received an award of £940,000.

Funding from the Scottish Government through the GSG continues to play a vital role in enabling projects that help the Council deliver its commitments under the Gaelic Language Plan. A significant proportion of this support contributes directly to the ongoing development and delivery of Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Learner Education.

Alongside core Council funding and the GSG, the Gaelic budget is further strengthened through successful project specific bids to Bòrd na Gàidhlig and the Strategic Gaelic Plan Fund (GPF), helping to enhance and expand Gaelic-related opportunities across the Council area.

3.2 Legal

The Highland Council has a statutory duty to implement its Gaelic Language Plan in terms of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act of 2005. Section 15 Education (Scotland) Act 2016 imposes a statutory duty on The Highland Council as Education Authority to promote and support Gaelic Education

3.3 Risk

There are no specific risk implications arising as a result of this report

3.4 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)

There are no specific risk implications arising as a result of this report

3.5 Gaelic

The Highland Council Gaelic Language Plan (GLP) 2024-29 has 2 key priorities for Gaelic Education;

- Deliver continued promotion and growth in GME and GLE at all levels including delivery of Gaelic as a modern language with 70% of primary schools providing Gaelic as an L2 and L3 to increase the provision of Gaelic across the authority.
- Expand the delivery of GME with increased secondary subject delivery creation of new standalone schools and new early years, primary and secondary provision.

Our GLP also includes interdependent communities and home, economy, culture, and heritage outcomes to support these priorities for Gaelic Education.

4. Impacts

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5. Mallaig – HMIE inspection

- 5.1 A recent HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) inspection outcome for Mallaig Primary School Early Learning and Childcare (ELC), highlighting the strengths identified by inspectors, areas for continued improvement, and the positive impact of the provision on children, families and the wider community.
- 5.2 Sgoil-àraich in Mallaig Primary achieved 3 Very Good ratings across all 3 Quality Indicators.

The [report](#) highlighted;

In 3-12 English and Gàidhlig Medium Education, children enjoy a caring and inclusive culture. Almost all children benefit from strong nurturing relationships with staff that supports wellbeing.

In 3-12 Gàidhlig and English Medium Education, children engage well with opportunities for sports, music, language and culture. These develop children's confidence, fluency and sense of being important members of a local and Gàidhlig community.

In the playroom for English and Gàidhlig Medium Education, children experience well-planned rich, play-based learning indoors, outdoors and in the community. In Gàidhlig Medium Education, staff deliver these experiences through fluent Gàidhlig.

- 5.3 HMIE gathered evidence to enable evaluation of the sgoil-àraich using three quality indicators from the Quality improvement framework for the early learning and childcare sectors.

Quality indicators for the sgoil-àraich nursery class	Evaluation
Curriculum	very good
Learning, teaching and assessment	very good
Wellbeing, inclusion and equality	very good

5.4 The following overall key strengths for Gaelic were identified across these 3 areas in the inspection;

- Very strong Gaelic immersion practice is evident across the setting.
- Children are thriving in a nurturing, inclusive and language-rich environment.
- Transitions into Gaelic Medium Education are particularly well supported.
- The setting demonstrates strong alignment with national Gaelic Education guidance and children's rights principles.
- Significant progress has been made in implementing national GME immersion guidance.
- Staff demonstrate high levels of Gaelic fluency and model language effectively throughout the day.
- Strong use of language targets to track children's Gaelic acquisition.
- The main next steps focus on strengthening curriculum documentation, protecting immersion opportunities, enhancing progression tracking in Gàidhlig and increasing the visibility of Gaelic across the wider school community.

6.0 1 plus 2 – National Context for Progression

6.1 National Context

The information below comes from the “1+2 Languages Policy: Findings from the 2024-25 survey of local authorities” [report, written by the Scottish Government](#). This biennial survey seeks to examine the progress and impact of the 1+2 initiative (for all languages) across Scotland and gather feedback from all local authorities.

6.2 Following on from the National 2024/25 1+2 Languages Survey of local authorities, the findings for Gaelic deliver the following key messages:

National Context:

Primary L2 - Gaelic (Learners) remained the third most taught language being provided by 5% of schools (quite stable from 3% in 2020-21 and 5% in 2022-23).

Highland Context:

Primary L2 – Gaelic (Learners) is provided by 21% of schools in Highland.

National Context:

Primary L3 - Gaelic (Learners) (9% up from 6% in 2022-23 and 8% in 2020-21) making it the 5th most taught L3 language nationally.

Highland Context:

Primary L3 – Gaelic (Learners) is provided by 46% of schools in Highland.

Factors contributing to Uptake:

“access to another speaker such as.....or Gaelic tutors also influenced the choice of L3 offered by schools” – In Highland, Live Gaelic Lessons providing language support to class teachers.

“Gaelic - was taught in schools with Gaelic Medium Units (GMUs) or where Gaelic culture was prominent.” – all GME settings in Highland offer Gaelic to EME settings (if applicable) as either an L2 or an L3 language.

National Context:

Secondary L2 - Gaelic (Learners) was taught in 8% of schools (compared to 8% in 2022-23 and 5% in 2020-21). This makes it the 4th most taught L2 language nationally.

Highland Context:

Secondary L2 – Gaelic (Learners) is provided by 17% of schools in Highland.

National Context:

Secondary L3 - Gaelic (Learners) (6%) makes it the 5th most taught L3 language nationally.

Highland Context:

Secondary L3 – Gaelic (Learners) is provided by 49% of schools in Highland.

National Context:

In Special Education Schools, 4% of SES offer Gaelic (Learners)

Highland Context:

Gaelic (Learners) is taught in St Duthus and St Clements SES (66%).

Secondary Gaelic Learners provision - Highland Context:

Pupils in publicly funded secondary schools											
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Total Highland	13,390	13,337	13,228	13,229	13,458	13,841	14,046	13,903	13,988	12,791	13,696
Gaelic Learners	1,474	1,829	2,012	1,887	2,131	2,208	2,204	2,030	2,123	2,065	1,953
% Gaelic Learners	10.99%	13.71%	15.21%	14.26%	15.84%	15.94%	15.7%	14.6%	15.17%	16.14%	14.27%
% Change		+24.71	+10.94	-6.24%	+11.08 %	+0.63 %	-1.51%	-7%	+3.9%	+6.39	- 11.58%

Overall, participation in Gaelic Learner Education has increased significantly over the last decade, rising from 1,474 learners in 2015/16 to 1,953 learners in 2025/26. While there has been a small reduction in learner numbers in the most recent year, the overall trend remains positive. Continued monitoring will be important to understand any factors influencing future participation and to support sustained growth.

With 1,953 Gaelic Learners recorded in Highland secondary schools, compared with 3,320 nationally, Highland provides Gaelic Learner experiences to almost six in every ten pupils studying Gaelic Learners in Scotland. This underlines the strategic importance of Gaelic education within Highland and the Council's substantial contribution and commitment to national Gaelic language objectives.

7.0 Supporting the growth and sustainability of Gaelic Education across Highland

7.1 Highland Council has demonstrated continued progress in strengthening and sustaining Gaelic Education across both the Lochaber and North areas.

In Lochaline, following the Gaelic Medium Education Request process, a strategic commitment to developing a clear GME pathway has enabled growth from the early years stage within the Sgoil-Àraich, building on the strong foundations established

through 0–3 Gaelic provision delivered in partnership with Gaelic Community Learning and Development officers.

This planned approach has supported the transition from emerging provision at 0-3 and immersion experiences in Sgoil-araich to a sustainable and permanent model for Gaelic Medium Education in the primary school. Gaelic medium is an ongoing and developed curriculum provision for their Associated secondary school in Ardnamurchan.

Similarly, within the North Area, work undertaken through the Gaelic Learner Education development plan to improve access to Gaelic within the Broad General Education phase and strengthen support across Associated School Groups has resulted in enhanced capacity within Farr High School and a more sustainable model of delivery for the next session.

- 7.2 Together, these developments demonstrate Highland Council's commitment to strengthening progression pathways, improving access to Gaelic education, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of Gaelic language provision in line with strategic GLP and national priorities.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - People

Date:30/6/2026

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Background Papers:

[1+2 languages policy: Findings from the 2024-25 survey of local authorities](#)