



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND LEARNING SERVICE

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

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal to establish a Gaelic Medium (GM) catchment area for Newtonmore 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 online on 31 August 2021.
- The report from Education Scotland.

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

CONTENTS

1.0 Background

2.0 Consultation process

3.0 Responses Received.

4.0 Issues Raised During Public Consultation

5.0 Summary of issues raised by Education Scotland.

6.0 Responses to the Issues raised by Education Scotland

7.0 Effects on the Community

8.0 Effects on School Transport

9.0 Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

10.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies.

11.0 Overall Review of Consultation Exercise

12.0 Legal issues

13.0 Conclusion

14.0 Recommendation

Appendices

Appendix 2 - Minute of public meeting held online on 31 August 2021

Appendix 3 - List of Respondents to Statutory Consultation

Appendix 3i-3iii – Copies of individual responses

Appendix 4 - Report from Education Scotland (English language version)

Appendix 5 - Report from Education Scotland (Gàidhlig language version)

Appendix A - The proposal document

Appendix B - Proposed GM catchment for Newtonmore Primary School

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Highland Council's Education Committee, at its meeting on 20 May 2021, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to establish a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Newtonmore Primary School.
- 1.2 The Proposal Paper suggested that the new catchment will overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of Newtonmore Primary School, Alvie Primary School, Aviemore Primary School, Gergask Primary School, and Kingussie Primary School. Particular arrangements would apply to school transport from the areas outwith the Newtonmore PS catchment.
- 1.3 The Proposal Paper also suggested formalising the current arrangements relating to Gàidhlig Medium Education (GME) in Kingussie High School, under which the catchment area for Kingussie 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 31 May 2021 to Friday 3 September 2021. 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 Newtonmore Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
 - (ii) Parents of pupils attending Alvie Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
 - (iii) Parents of pupils attending Aviemore Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
 - (iv) Parents of pupils attending Gergask Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
 - (v) Parents of pupils attending Kingussie Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils;
 - (vi) Parents of pupils attending Kingussie High School;
 - (vii) The Parent Councils of each of the above schools;
 - (viii) Staff of the schools listed above;
 - (ix) Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal;
 - (x) Trade union representatives;
 - (xi) All Community Councils for the areas covered by the Proposal;
 - (xii) Bòrd na Gàidhlig;
 - (xiii) Education Scotland;
- 2.3 The proposal document was advertised on the Highland Council website.
- 2.4 A public meeting was held online on 31 August 2021. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website and in the *Badenoch and Strathspey Herald*. The note of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.
- 2.5 The public meeting had originally been scheduled for 24 August at Newtonmore Primary School, but was postponed and re-arranged online due to a local recrudescence of COVID-19 cases.
- 2.6 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 A list of those who responded in writing during the public consultation is at **Appendix 3**. There were 3 written responses received during the consultation period. Copies of these responses can also be found at **Appendices 3i-3iii**.

Two responses were submitted on behalf of organisations (Comann nam Pàrant, and Bòrd na Gàidhlig), and one from a parent.

- 3.2 Although the one parental response was received after the deadline, the Council had agreed to accept this submission, due to the postponement of the public meeting.

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.

Issue 1

Bòrd na Gàidhlig welcomes the recommendation that a catchment area will be established for Newtonmore Primary School where there is GME provision. The education authority has considered both reasonable travel distance and arrangements for pupils and parents.

Response 1

The Council notes and welcomes this response.

Issue 2

Comann nam Pàrant welcomes the formalisation of a school catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education (GME) in the Newtonmore area.

Although we [i.e., CnamP] agree with the setting of the catchment, should parents in the catchments of any of the other associated schools submit a request in the future for GME in line with the Education Act (Scotland) 2016, we trust that Highland Council will follow the process for requests as set out in Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education.

CnamP also welcomes the extension to the nursery at Newtonmore Primary and hope this will mean delivery of 1140 hours in Gaelic which has the potential to attract more families to GME.

Response 2

The Council welcomes the response of Comann nam Pàrant, and confirms that any future parental demand for local provision of GME from within the Alvie, Aviemore, Gergask, and Kingussie school catchments would be assessed in accordance with the Education (Scotland) Act 2016.

The GM nursery at Newtonmore PS is already offering 1140 hours per year of childcare/pre-school education.

Issue 3

When the Proposal was first published, a number of assumptions and sweeping and provocative statements were made regarding future class sizes at Newtonmore Primary. In particular, it was predicted that, based on recent historical patterns of enrolment, the school would eventually have 3 GM and 3 EM classes. The initial Proposal Paper left out some vital documentation to put this information in context. These included the information on the Highland Council's pupil to class size ratio as well as the Highland Council's methodology for forecasting pupil rolls.

Response 3

The above information is not normally included in Proposal Papers, and the class size ratio and methodology for forecasting were not the subject of this consultation exercise. The information was provided after being requested, and during the consultation period.

The Council does not accept that the omission of the above information constitutes a material consideration to the Proposal. The increase anticipated in children accessing GME in the next few years, and the decrease in numbers accessing EME, are forecast from the number of current nursery enrolments in Newtonmore Primary School, as well as being extrapolated from historic trends. They are thus a reflection of enrolments made prior to this Proposal being issued, and cannot be attributed to the creation of the proposed catchment.

The Council's forecast of a fall in the EM numbers at Newtonmore PS is expected to occur regardless of whether or not we create a GM catchment. The forecast derives from the expectation that more parents from Newtonmore itself will choose GME in preference to EME.

Issue 4

There is a fear that by bringing in pupils in from outwith the Newtonmore catchment area (regardless of the reason, GME or otherwise) whilst the school roll is lower than previous years, that there will be no space for future pupils from Newtonmore should numbers rise. It is unknown how many pupils are likely to request GME provision from outwith the Newtonmore catchment area following the introduction of this initiative. Whilst parents have been provided with some reassurance in subsequent correspondence, it is surprising that this reassurance was not included in the initial Proposal.

Response 4

Paragraph 5.1 of the Proposal Paper (Appendix A) set out that Newtonmore PS currently has 6 classrooms. During the current session the school has 77 pupils in English Medium education and 33 in Gàidhlig medium education. This means the school has 4 EM and 2 GM classes. The school could have up to 96 pupils in the 4 EM classes and up to 47 in the 2 GM classes, so at the moment the school is a long way short of those figures. Because the vast majority of pupils in the school are from Newtonmore itself, any rise in the GM roll would likely to be accompanied by a fall in the EM roll, or vice versa. For the forthcoming two years, the school is expected to have 3 EM and 2 GM classes.

The school's capacity would only be breached if there was a situation where the EM roll remained at 72 or above (four classes) and the GM roll increased to 48 or above (three classes). At present this seems a very unlikely scenario, that could only arise if there were an unexpected and significant increase in GM pupils coming from other parts of the area. The Council has so far created 11 GM catchments for primary schools and has not seen such a pattern develop elsewhere. There is therefore, no particular reason to suppose that the creation of the GM catchment would create a sudden increase in demand for GME.

In the Council's view the fear expressed in Issue 4 is therefore unjustified, and it was for that reason that the issue was not addressed in detail in the Proposal Paper.

Issue 5

There is no clarity regarding what contingencies have been planned to address the situation of future oversubscribing at Newtonmore PS, should it arise. Whilst options have been discussed, they are not a foregone conclusion. Comments made at the public meeting and in subsequent correspondence would suggest there is no plan.

Response 5

It is not possible for Highland Council to prepare and announce detailed plans for hypothetical scenarios that may or may not occur many years into the future. As was highlighted at the meeting, we have already created 11 GM catchments in Highland, and we are not aware that any have produced a flood of GM pupils coming in from other areas. In the unlikely event of this happening, the detailed solution would need to be considered at the time. The Council has however given the assurance that we will not send pupils from Newtonmore to other schools to accommodate GM pupils from outwith Newtonmore.

Issue 6

Why has Kingussie Primary School not been seriously considered as a suitable base for primary GME learning? The school roll has historically been lower than that of Newtonmore Primary School. The physical site of Kingussie Primary School is larger and able to expand to cater for future demand. The proximity of Kingussie High School's already established secondary GME provision to Kingussie Primary School is close. If pupils are to be transported to a school then the proximity of Kingussie to Newtonmore is in real terms negligible and will not greatly impact those pupils already being transported. Appendix B of the GME proposal quite clearly demonstrates this fact. Again, this would ensure sustainability in the long term rather than looking for additional provision elsewhere.

Response 6

As mentioned elsewhere, the vast majority of the current GM pupils at Newtonmore Primary School are from within the Newtonmore catchment itself. Very few pupils currently travel from the other communities within the ASG. We anticipate that moving the GM provision from Newtonmore PS to Kingussie PS would lead to a drop-off in the numbers attending GME, as at least some, and possibly many, of the current GM pupils would not wish to travel to Kingussie to continue to access GME.

Legally, such a proposal would represent the closure of the GM Department at Newtonmore PS and the opening of a new provision at Kingussie PS. The first element of the above would require a full-scale statutory consultation, involving ratification by Scottish Ministers. Such proposals can only be advanced on the basis of educational benefits to the pupils. There would therefore need to be a very strong educational justification to offset the inevitable disruption to pupils, and the likely fall-off in the numbers attending GME. At present no such justification exists.

Issue 7

If Newtonmore Primary School is to be used as the base for GME primary education, then sustainability and physical capacity is the main concern. The Council's informal suggestion to provide additional provision at alternative neighbouring schools seems to concede that Newtonmore Primary School lacks the physical space to extend further. Whereas Kingussie Primary School does. I am also concerned that this contingency was not contained within the original proposal document and needs to be included following any policy decision and ratified at member level should Newtonmore Primary School be chosen as the ASG centre for GME primary education.

Response 7

In practice, Newtonmore Primary School is already the centre for GME primary education within the Kingussie Associated School Group. There are already pupils attending GME from other school catchments within the ASG. This proposal merely formalises the existing arrangements, that have arisen through custom and practice.

The Council has previously commented that pressure on capacity would only arise if there are a substantial number of enrolments in GME from Kingussie and Aviemore (the other catchments being probably too small to contribute a large number of pupils). Were that situation to arise, it would be sensible to examine the possibility of providing GME in those schools, rather than have large numbers travelling daily to Newtonmore. If such provision was set up, it would almost certainly be in addition to the provision at Newtonmore, rather than as a replacement of it. Closure of the GM Department within Newtonmore Primary School would be regarded as the equivalent of a full school closure, and would be subject to statutory consultation on the same basis.

Issue 8

The initial proposal document has been flawed from the outset. The proposal has omitted crucial and important facts. With public meetings held on-line, through no fault of HC – but due to COVID-19 restrictions, it has prevented full and effective public consultation on the matter. Whilst I am grateful to the Council for allowing the above document to be submitted beyond the deadline (September 3rd), as a member of the public, I should not have had to continually probe to fully discover the true implications of this proposal. Indeed it was echoed at the Parent Council that the proposal had changed since its original publication. The lack of clarity and disclosure has led to friction within the community – where some have suggested there is a struggle for resources between EME and GME provision. Some have even suggested that this has something to do with the Head Teacher being a Gaelic speaker. This is indeed not the case.

I am in full support of GME provision. I have been to the Lochaber GME primary school in Caol (Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar), which is a fantastic facility. I wish there was the same opportunity in this area. I am only concerned that given the limited facilities available in Newtonmore – trying to ‘fit a quart into a pint pot’ is not a sustainable solution.

Response 8

The issue of the information provided in the Proposal Paper is addressed at Response 3 above, and that of the limited capacity at Newtonmore is addressed at Response 4. The Parent Council minutes for the meeting in question do not record the view that the Proposal had changed from its original publication. Whilst the minutes are only a summary of the

discussion, the issue does not appear to have been a significant one for the Parent Council.

It is disappointing to hear that the Proposal has caused friction within the community. The Highland Council welcomes the free expression of views in response to its consultation exercises, and there is no reason to regard the Proposal as a struggle for resources between GME and EME.

- 4.2 The note of the public meeting is at Appendix 2. Three questions were raised and were answered during the meeting. The questions covered issues that were also raised in the written responses and are addressed above.

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 All consultees valued that Gaelic Medium Education was an option available to parents. From year to year, enrolments in early learning and childcare and P1 determine pupil uptake for Gaelic Medium Education. Projecting and confirming the uptake for Gaelic Medium Education in nursery and P1 cannot fully be made until the time of enrolments. Whilst recognising this, there are a few implementation issues on school estates strategy that the council should clarify further in its final report. Reassurances are required on how the council manage funding, resources and any increase in uptake for Gaelic Medium Education. Those residing in the existing catchment area of Newtonmore sought confirmation that education through English would always be available at their local primary, should Gaelic Medium Education enrolments increase. In doing this, the council should consider any plans for house building programmes in the area. They should also confirm how they will use the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 to meet future requests and grow more local provisions by adding Gaelic Medium Education classes to existing provisions, as well as the need for all Gaelic schools.
- 5.4 The educational benefit statement should expand further on the curricular benefits from this proposal. Currently, the proposal paper refers to educational benefits from consolidating existing provisions. It would be helpful to specify how the proposal will help the council meet the targets they have set as statutory in their Gaelic language planning for a 3-18 immersion curriculum.

These duties are specified in the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017.

- 5.5 The council needs to more clearly connect this proposal with the objectives of their Gaelic Language Plan. For this, they should encourage further collaboration between their 3-18 Gaelic Medium specialists, as well as senior leaders who design the curriculum. The council needs to clarify how they have sought the views of children and young people across schools named in this proposal, and the staff at Kingussie High School.
- 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 9

The Council should confirm to parents in Newtonmore that education through English would always be available at their local primary, should Gaelic Medium Education enrolments increase. In doing this, the council should consider any plans for house building programmes in the area. They should also confirm how they will use the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 to meet future requests and grow more local provisions by adding Gaelic Medium Education classes to existing provisions, as well as the need for all Gaelic schools. Reassurances are required on how the council will manage funding, resources and any increase in uptake for Gaelic Medium Education.

Response 9

The Council has already made it clear that we would not refuse places in Newtonmore Primary School to children from the Newtonmore catchment, whether they be attending English medium or Gaelic medium education. English Medium education could only be removed from Newtonmore Primary via a school closure proposal under the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, which would have to be ratified by Scottish Ministers. The Council has absolutely no plans to bring forward such a proposal.

The Council already takes planned house building into account when forecasting future rolls, as well as making an allowance for “ad hoc” house building development.

Issue 10

The educational benefit statement should expand further on the curricular benefits from this proposal. Currently, the proposal paper refers to educational benefits from consolidating existing provisions. It would be helpful to specify how the proposal will help the council meet the targets they have set as statutory in their Gaelic language planning for a 3-18 immersion curriculum

Response 10

The Council is clear that the creation of GM catchments is a requirement of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, and would therefore need to be undertaken irrespective of whether there are demonstrable educational benefits.

However the Proposal does involve promoting the availability of GME to parents in schools that do not offer it. Parents may become aware of the availability of transport for the first time, as well as of the benefits of bilingualism.

The Council's Gaelic Language Plan currently includes a target to "Increase the percentage of the pupil population who are being educated through the medium of Gaelic in primary school to 10%." The target date for this is August 2023.

As of session 2021-22, the proportion of primary school pupils attending GME was 6.44%. The cumulative percentage increase from 2017/18 to 2021/22 in each sector is as follows.

ELC – 13.3% increase
 Primary – 18.4% increase
 Secondary Gàidhlig Fluent – 23.6% increase
 Secondary GME – 6.9% increase
 Secondary GLE – 17.2% increase

The creation of GM catchments will play a part in the Council's overall strategy of promoting GME and increasing the proportion of Highland pupils accessing it.

Issue 11

The council needs to more clearly connect this proposal with the objectives of their Gaelic Language Plan. For this, they should encourage further collaboration between their 3-18 Gaelic Medium specialists, as well as senior leaders who design the curriculum.

Response 11

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 year's 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.

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 catchment to attend GME at Newtonmore Primary School. It will therefore assist with our aim of increasing enrolments, and forms part of our Strategy of providing improved transitions that will help retain children within GME.

During the end of Session 20/21, Highland Council's Strategic Lead for secondary education invited all Secondary Head Teachers with a responsibility for delivery of Gàidhlig education within their curriculum to meet. At this meeting, the changes to the School Improvement Plan to include direct reporting on Gaelic development work for GME was discussed as well as the understanding of the importance of developing the breadth of curriculum available through GME. A further workshop on Gaelic and Gaelic Awareness was then planned, organised by the Empowerment Team and led by the Gaelic Education Support Officer, where all Head Teachers in Highland Council were invited to meet and hear about the aims and outcomes of the HC GLP and Education Scotland's advice on GME and Gaelic Education.

Highland Council has welcomed the recent initiative from Education Scotland for an A9 Corridor Gaelic Secondaries Cross RIC Network involving Kingussie High School, Perth Academy, Breadalbane Academy and Wallace High School, Stirling. The aims of this Network will be:

To facilitate collaboration and partnership between the schools, in particular to strengthen curricular offers.

To encourage sharing of good practice, resources and timetabling

To develop networks for School Leaders and Classroom Teachers

To enable collaborative events for young people in similar sized Gaelic cohorts.

There will be a GLOW group and Education Scotland will facilitate meetings on a termly basis.

Issue 12

The council needs to clarify how they have sought the views of children and young people across schools named in this proposal, and the staff at Kingussie High School.

Response 12

Over the past few years, the Council has created 11 of GM catchments for primary schools offering GME. Generally we have found it difficult to get meaningful feedback from primary age pupils.

The Head Teacher of Newtonmore Primary School met with all the P7s and P4-7 pupils during the week of 19 November to discuss the GM catchment.

She explained to them what a catchment area was, the requirement for every school to have a catchment area, and how the GM catchment area differs to the EM catchment area and why.

She then opened the Proposal up for discussion with children over the advantages and disadvantages of the proposed catchment area.

Advantages identified by the children were that more children would be able to learn Gaelic, and that children would be able to attend from out-with the village.

The disadvantages were to do with the school's accommodation, though this was partly led by the staff. Discussions concerned losing part of the playground if another extension has to be built, over-crowding in the school if additional classes are required, and over-crowding in the playground if there were too many pupils.

Staff within the Gaelic Department of Kingussie High School advise that they were considered they were kept fully informed of the consultation, and the proposal has no real effect on the rest of the school. Staff at the High School do of course have the same opportunity as anyone else to respond to a public consultation exercise.

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 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 Alleged omissions from the Proposal Paper are addressed at Responses 4-8 above. None of the alleged omissions relate to matters specified in the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

10.2 Having carefully considered this matter, the Council has concluded that the impact of this alleged inaccuracy does not represent a material consideration relevant to the Authority's decision as to implementation of the proposal. Responses 4-8 above set out the Council's reasons for coming to this conclusion.

11.0 Overall Review of Consultation Exercise

11.1 Only 3 written responses were received, two of which were in support of the Proposal. One person spoke at the public meeting to express concern about the proposal, the same person who also submitted concerns in writing. The issues raised with Education Scotland are recorded above.

11.2 The main concern expressed is around the potential for the capacity of Newtonmore PS to be exceeded, should there be a large influx of pupils from other parts of the ASG seeing GME at Newtonmore Primary School. This issue has been addressed in detail at Responses 4, 5 6, and 8 above.

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 met online with parents, pupils and staff at Newtonmore Primary School, and gathered a range 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 Newtonmore Primary School offers educational benefits and should be implemented.

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.

Nicky Grant

Executive Chief Officer, Education

20 January 2022