

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to establish a catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education at Newtonmore Primary School and Kingussie High School.

September 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her 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 The Highland Council's proposal to establish a catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education at Newtonmore Primary School and Kingussie High School. 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' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final 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 final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision.

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 virtual public meeting held on 31 August 2021 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
- discussions 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 31 May 2021 to 3 September 2021. The proposal paper was distributed to staff, Parent Councils and parents of pupils attending the primary schools detailed within the proposal paper. It was also sent to members of the United Kingdom and Scottish Parliaments, trade unions, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and community councils. A notice was placed in local press. Information was available on the council's website and on social media. In the final report, the council should indicate how they have consulted children and young people and staff at Kingussie High School.

2.3 The council hosted a virtual public meeting at which officers set a rationale for the proposals, discussed high-level educational benefits and invited attendee views. There were 14 in

attendance at the virtual public meeting. Less than a few attendees raised questions on the use of intelligence underpinning the proposal. They also raised a query on the proposal's impact on pupils' capacity to attend English Medium at Newtonmore Primary School should the proposal, if agreed, result in an increase in pupil numbers attending Gaelic Medium Education. Overall, they requested more transparency and clarity on a few aspects of the proposal. Three written responses were received, one of which raised similar issues to those aired at the public meeting. Bòrd na Gàidhlig is a statutory consultee for changes to arrangements for Gaelic Medium Education provision. They welcomed that a catchment area was being set for Gaelic Medium Education and did not identify any concerns. Comann nam Pàrant welcomed that the proposal enacted legislation. They highlighted that further clarity was required on how the council would respond to future expansion and parental requests within local areas. They also raised issues around the benefits of the proposal to the curriculum and children's learning. In particular, they referenced total immersion as part of the expansion to 1140 hours in early learning and childcare. Additionally, the availability of a meaningful proportion of the secondary curriculum through the medium of Gaelic.

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. The council is proposing catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education at Newtonmore Primary School and Kingussie High School. These will overlay the catchment areas of all primary schools associated with Kingussie High School, depending on the results of the consultation. Almost all the pupils currently attending Gaelic Medium Education at Newtonmore Primary School are from within the school's catchment area for English Medium. This proposal assists the council in clarifying parents' entitlement and admission arrangements to Gaelic Medium Education, whilst pursuing its duty to provide best value.

3.2 Almost all consultees supported the council in establishing a catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education. There are a few issues and concerns arising from the consultation that merit further consideration. 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 pupils' 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.

3.3 The educational benefit statement should expand further on the curricular benefits from this proposal. Currently, the proposal paper refers to educational benefits as helping to "consolidate" 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.

4. Summary

Overall, the council's proposal is of educational benefit to children and parents who reside within the catchment areas for Kingussie High School. The proposal gives clarity to parents on how to access Gaelic Medium Education. The council should define further how an increased uptake for English and/or Gaelic Medium Education will be met in an equitable manner. 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.

**HM Inspectors
September 2021**