



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND LEARNING SERVICE

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

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal to establish a Gaelic Medium (GM) catchment area for Acharacle 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 29 September 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.

Following consideration of the responses received during consultation, the Council is proposing changes to the original Proposal. The detailed changes are set out at Response 5, and Section 13, below.

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 29 September 2021

Appendix 3 - List of Respondents to Statutory Consultation

Appendix 3i-3xiii – 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 Acharacle 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 Acharacle Primary School.
- 1.2 The Proposal Paper suggested that the new catchment will overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of Acharacle Primary School, Kilchoan Primary School, and Strontian Primary School. Two other catchment areas within the Associated School Group (ASG), Ardgour and Lochaline Primary Schools, were not included in the proposed GM catchments, due to the costs and travel distances between these locations and Acharacle.
- 1.3 The Proposal Paper also suggested formalising the current arrangements relating to Gàidhlig Medium Education (GME) in Ardnamurchan High School, under which the catchment area for Ardnamurchan 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 Acharacle Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (ii) Parents of pupils attending Kilchoan Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (iii) Parents of pupils attending Strontian Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (iv) Parents of pupils attending Ardgour Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (v) Parents of pupils attending Lochaline Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (vi) Parents of pupils attending Ardnamurchan 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 29 September 2021. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website and in the *Lochaber Times*. The note of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.

2.5 The public meeting had originally been scheduled to take place at Acharacle Primary School, but was changed to an online meeting due to the continuing level 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 12 written responses received during the consultation period, although several of these reported the views of school pupils. A further response was received after the end of the consultation period. Copies of these can also be found at **Appendices 3i-3xiii**. Four responses were on behalf of organisations - Comann nam Pàrant, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Ardgour Community Council and Ardgour Primary School Parent Council.

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 Acharacle Primary School where there is GME provision.

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) for Acharacle Primary School. The proposal is in keeping with Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education which recommends that local authorities establish catchments with reasonable travelling distances, and with the potential to attract parents to GME.

Although we [i.e. CnamP] agree with the setting of the catchment, we welcome the assurance in the introduction to the proposal that, 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, Highland Council will follow the process for requests as set out in Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education.

Response 2

The Council notes and welcomes the response of Comann nam Pàrant, and confirms that any future parental demand for local provision of GME from within the Ardgour, Kilchoan, Lochaline and Strontian catchments would be assessed in accordance with the Education (Scotland) Act 2016.

Issue 3

I fully support this proposal so that my two young children get the opportunity to attend Gaelic Medium education when they are of age. Gaelic was my mother's first language, and I feel GM education should be available to every child in Highland.

Response 3

The Council notes and welcomes this response.

Issue 4

Everyone is entitled to learn Gaelic if they want to, so they should be able to travel to a school that offers the language.

Gaelic is the language of Scotland and should be available to everyone. It is fun to learn Gaelic. There should be no limit on travel.

Response 4

In principle the Council agrees that Gaelic should be available to every school pupil. For various reasons we are not yet in a position to achieve that, but there are more Gaelic medium pupils in Highland than in any other Council area in Scotland.

The geography of Highland is such that there are some areas where it is unrealistic to expect pupils to travel to Gaelic Medium education. A better solution would be to offer Gaelic Medium education in more schools than we currently do, and that would be our long-term goal.

Issue 5

Parents should have a choice. Since public transport to Fort William already exists, and this will likely affect a small minority, it does not seem unreasonable to offer the choice of a child attending either BSGL or Acharacle PS, with transport provided. Should the child go to Fort William you have nothing to arrange. Should they go to Acharacle the route to the school is extended for that child. Ardgour is in the position of being between two schools but close to neither.

We would always want to support Ardnamurchan High and the risk of children going to Fort William for their secondary schooling would increase should they attend a GM school in town.

The main hindrance to Ardgour PS pupils being included in the proposed catchment for Acharacle GM school is the distance and associated cost of

travel. The proposal suggests that 15 miles is deemed the furthest appropriate distance for primary pupils to travel.

Ardgour CC would consider the lack of the right to free transport to Acharacle PS (APS), a serious reduction in parental choice. The CC consider that parents in Ardgour should be given the opportunity to access either APS or Bun Sgoil Gaidhlig Loch Abair (BSGL) with equitable provision to free transport and also with equitable provision as the other peninsula schools in the Ardnamurchan HS Catchment. Following the HC Gaelic Language Policy, we should be encouraging young people to stay within their own communities and develop bi-lingual skills. It is recognised by the CC that pupils who attend BSGL are more likely to follow secondary education through to LHS encouraging our young people to leave the area in which they live. The Gaelic provision at Ardnamurchan High School and at Acharacle GME is recognised as being of a very high standard and brings young people across the peninsula together in a way that was not happening previously.

Points raised at our recent meeting included:

1. During previous historical communications with Area Manager (West) concerning the proposal to dual Lochaline Primary School and Ardgour Primary School, it was stressed that linking a school within the Ardnamurchan ASG was of primary importance in maintaining the specific nature of the peninsula culture, ethos and heritage. This statement was made during discussion on why it would be considered inappropriate to link Ardgour PS with a primary in the Onich/Balachulish area.
2. Following the decision of some parents in the Achaphubuil Primary school catchment area to remove their children to Banavie which eventually led to mothballing of Achaphubuil Primary, Highland Council was happy to provide transport to Banavie PS which is a greater distance than 15 miles. Please note that the distance to Ardgour PS for Achaphubuil residents and communities further west, is less than 15 miles.
3. A further point on distance is that the furthest outreach of the Ardgour PS catchment is 5 miles from Acharacle PS and, whereas the majority of Ardgour PS pupils come from the Ardgour and Clovullin areas, this would only mean an additional 5 miles to the arbitrary 15.

We have an amazing educational provision on the peninsula, including excellent GM provision at primary and secondary levels and would not wish to see this undermined by the exclusion of Ardgour PS pupils from the catchment for Acharacle GM school and potentially Ardnamurchan High School.

We request parity for GME provision for Ardgour and Lochaline with the other 3 peninsula schools and that they should be included within the catchment. Ardgour primary school is only 5 miles outwith the suggested catchment area, with most of their pupils within walking distance of the

primary school. The suggested maximum distance of 15 miles is arbitrary and in the past children have traveled further to access GME.

In the future, it would be all but impossible to establish a new GMU in either Ardgour or Lochaline as the threshold requires 4-5 pupils requesting GME in these tiny primary schools. After opening the Acharacle GMU 30 years ago, we tried and failed to establish GMUs in both Lochaline and Ardgour primary schools when their school roll was significantly greater. For HC to provide the opportunity to access GME for the Ardnamurchan and Morvern peninsulas requires Ardgour, Strontian, Lochaline and Kilchoan to be within the catchment area. The substantial Gaelic Specific Grant to HC, as well as support from BnG, should provide the funding for the necessary transport.

The current HC Gaelic Language Plan has a target of increasing the number of pupils in GME to 10% by 2023. Enrolment in 20/21 stands at only 6.8%. Including Ardgour and Lochaline in the catchment area will assist in the HC reaching their target. The active promotion of the educational and cognitive benefits of bilingual education would help HC to reach their target.

Finally, there is the remote and rural ethos of the Ardnamurchan and Morvern peninsulas with the pupils from all 5 primary schools attending Ardnamurchan High School. It has an excellent Gaelic dept with 3 teachers and a wide range of subjects available through GM. Both Ardgour and Lochaline are a part of that ethos and should be included within the catchment area for Acharacle GME Unit.

Response 5

We would not offer a choice of transport to more than one school for GME purposes. In practical terms, someone living in North Corran or Clovullin could potentially cross the Corran Ferry and travel to the Bun-sgoil Gàidhlig Loch Abar (BSGL) using the public buses which travel between Fort William and South Lochaber, but their attendance at BSGL would be on a placing request basis. Since the creation of Ardnamurchan High School, only 3 children from Ardgour have ever travelled to Fort William to access GME, and two of these subsequently attended Ardnamurchan High. Based on past evidence, there seems little prospect of a significant shift of pupils away from the Peninsula towards BSGL and Lochaber High School.

Historically pupils attending GME have been offered transport within a 15-mile radius of the nearest school to offer GME. The delineation of catchments is designed to replace that informal system.

The Proposal Paper set out the reasons why it was originally proposed to exclude Ardgour PS from the proposed GM catchment for Acharacle PS, those reasons being the travel time and potential cost of such journeys, which in almost every case would involve a one-way journey of at least 25 miles, much of it along single track roads.

The Council still considers it is very unlikely that any pupil would wish to make such a journey, but we have reflected on the weight of the comments received during the consultation, and in response have decided to amend the proposal to include Ardgour PS within the GM catchment.

Under this revised proposal Lochaline would continue to be outside the GM catchment. The travel distance from Lochaline to Acharacle is even longer than that from Ardgour, and there have been no representations from Morvern itself on this matter. It is also understood that parents from Lochaline have expressed an interest in the provision of GME within Lochaline PS itself.

Issue 6

I support the establishment of the catchment as proposed subject to the following qualifications:

- That, as stated on page 1 of the proposal paper, it remains open for other primary schools in the area to receive Gaelic Medium Education (GME) in the future - and that the presence of the catchment area is not used subsequently to argue against this;
- That flexibility is shown to pupils outwith the proposed catchment area to ensure they are assisted in accessing GME within the peninsulas, rather than being 'lost' to Fort William or Mull (and subsequently from Ardnamurchan High School);
- That it is recognised that a catchment area for Acharacle is only an acceptable solution short-term, and that the real opportunity lies in expanding GME provision to other primary schools within the Associated School Group.

With respect to the last of these, I would make the following further observations:

- The Education Scotland Act (2016) – and the slightly more flexible Highland Council policy deriving from it – are fundamentally flawed, in respect of assessment requests for GME. Setting a threshold of 4 or 5 pupils before an assessment can be made discriminates against small, rural primary schools, where this annual number of pupils overall is rarely if ever achieved. Thus the very areas with the closest links to Gaelic as a community language are being prevented from accessing GME. Highland Council, through both officers and elected members, needs to address this issue and also raise it with Scottish Government.
- Paragraph 1.1 of the proposal references the statutory duty “to promote and support Gaelic Medium education and learning” of education authorities. This is welcome and it is hoped will be adhered to. However, it is important to contrast this with the reality, through my own ‘lived experience’ in Strontian. During the 17-year period when I had children in nursery and/or primary school, I cannot

recall a single instance of such promotion of GME – and as a strong supporter, it is most unlikely I would have forgotten. Not once did Highland Council provide information to parents, through distribution of leaflets, letters home in school bags, organising parent or community meetings etc. It is hard not to conclude from this that HC is not in fact committed to expanding the geographical coverage of GME, and indeed the evidence on the ground seems to bear this out – there are actually fewer GME primary schools in the HC area now than there were 10 years ago (2011-12). *[Bòrd na Gàidhlig data]*

Response 6

Paragraph 1.30 of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education states that the threshold for an *obligatory* full assessment under the 2016 Act is where an education authority is satisfied that there is demand for Gaelic Medium Primary Education (GMPE) in the GMPE assessment area from the parents of at least five children who are resident in the GMPE assessment area and all in the same pre-school year group. However, at all times, education authorities retain a *discretion* to provide GMPE, and the Statutory Guidance goes on to state that an education authority should consider other information, such as demand in relation to children in a different year group, in deciding whether to exercise that discretion.

Since there is a discretion to create GMPE in a school even where the condition of five children in a year group is not met, there is no need to raise the issue further with Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

Clearly the smaller the number of children in a GME class, the less viable the class becomes.

Issue 7

I would like to add my support to the comments made in relation to the potential impact on Ardnamurchan High School should the proposal to formalise the Acharacle GM catchment area go ahead. Acharacle's catchment area is within Ardnamurchan High school's catchment area and therefore any changes to Acharacle's boundaries will impact on AHS.

As was highlighted, if the invitation to establish GM provision is taken up by parents from Lochaline or Ardgour, (and if for any one of several reasons they are unable to have GME provided for their children on their own premises), they will therefore be obliged to send their children to BSGL, as the only viable option open to them. It is natural therefore, having been primary schooled in BSGL that these children will proceed to Àrd-sgoil Lochabar for their secondary schooling.

Any leakage of pupils, in this case, GM pupils from Lochaline or Ardgour primaries who would previously have fed onto AHS, will almost certainly have a detrimental effect on AHS as a whole. Not least, the potential loss of teaching staff or teachers' hours due to a reduction in school roll.

It is also worth noting however, that a reduction in GM pupils and hence staff, will not only impact on GME but also on the whole-school experience of both EM and GM pupils alike. This issue therefore is not just of concern to parents of GM pupils whose cohort numbers will naturally be reduced (not a great model for encouraging increased language use between peers), but for all future parents who are seeking quality education and the best all-round experience for their children at Àrd-sgoil Àird nam Murchain.

Response 7

The issues related to Ardgour are covered at Response 5.

If, in the event, GMPE is not established within Lochaline Primary School itself, there is no more reason to suppose pupils from that catchment would submit a placing request to BSGL than they would to Acharacle PS. The journey from Lochaline to Caol would take more than an hour one-way by road, plus a crossing of the Corran Ferry.

Issue 8

Without knowing the demand, how can you make the statement in 9.1 of the Proposal Paper. You don't know how many parents (current or future) are likely to take their children out of Strontian Primary and therefore can't say with any certainty what effect it is going have on the school roll and consequently the staff and staffing level.

Response 8

Paragraph 9.1 of the Proposal Paper (see Appendix A) advised that the Council "does not expect" any significant impact on local school rolls, or on staff within the schools of the Ardnamurchan ASG. This view is based on 3 factors:

- i. There is an existing "custom and practice" arrangement under which pupils from the Strontian PS catchment can attend Gaelic Medium Education (GME) at Acharacle PS, and at the present time a small number of pupils from the Strontian PS catchment do exactly that. As the Proposal simply formalises that existing arrangement, the Council does believe that, in itself, it is likely to have a significant impact on current patterns of enrolment within the primary schools of the Ardnamurchan Associated School Group (ASG).
- ii. So far, Highland Council has created 11 Gaelic Medium catchment areas and in most of these, the new GM catchment overlays several English Medium catchments, as has been proposed for Acharacle. However, in none of these have we

seen any significant shifts in patterns of enrolment from before and after the creation of the catchment.

- iii. The travel time between Strontian and Acharacle will clearly be a factor for any parent in the Strontian school catchment who is considering enrolling their child in Acharacle PS.

4.2 The note of the public meeting is at Appendix 2. Eleven questions and observations 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 agreed that the proposal has potential to result in educational benefits. However, there are a few aspects of the proposal still to be considered to ensure that all learners progressing to Ardnamurchan High School have equity and equality in how they access learning of and through Gaelic.

5.3 Inspectors noted that the strategic leaders within the associated school group are very aware of the local and rural contexts of their schools. They talked about embedding a vision for an 'Ardnamurchan identity'. Along with a few others, their desire was to not lose potential pupils from Ardour Primary through placing requests to other schools. In the final report, the council should be clearer on how they will reduce barriers to future requests from parents for Gaelic Medium Education at Lochaline and Ardour Primary Schools. This should include addressing barriers such as transport costs and smaller pupil rolls as may be part of rural education. The council should also be clear on how their proposal supports the expansion of funded free hours being available through Gaelic for children aged three to five years. The educational benefit statement should include how the proposal is going to help the council meet their Gaelic language plan targets for the secondary stages. This is as part of a progressive 3-18 immersion curriculum. It should include how all children and young people in English Medium can learn Gaelic regularly and progressively as a means to promote equity. In doing this, there should be clarity on the different outcomes from Gaelic (Learners) and Gaelic Medium Education.

5.5 HMIE Inspectors recommended that, in its final report, the council needs to make clear how parents make future requests for establishing further Gaelic Medium Education as set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. They should do so with a particular regard to rural areas. They also need to mitigate against potential future equity barriers such as transport costs and access to early learning and childcare through Gaelic. These may prevent parents

making placing requests for Gaelic Medium Education. The council, working with the senior leaders within the associated school group, should have a clear strategy to promote the benefits and opportunities for Gaelic Medium Education in an ongoing, robust way. They should also provide more detail on how children will travel safely during long journeys.

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

In the final report, the council should be clearer on how they will reduce barriers to future requests from parents for Gaelic Medium Education at Lochaline and Ardgour Primary Schools. This should include addressing barriers such as transport costs and smaller pupil rolls as may be part of rural education.

In its final report, the council needs to make clear how parents make future requests for establishing further Gaelic Medium Education as set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. They should do so with a particular regard to rural areas. They also need to mitigate against potential future equity barriers such as transport costs and access to early learning and childcare through Gaelic. They should also provide more detail on how children will travel safely during long journeys.

Response 9

The Proposal Paper made it clear that any identified parental demand for local provision of GME from within the Ardgour and Lochaline catchments would be assessed in accordance with the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. This process would also apply to the Strontian and Kilchoan catchments, that are included within the proposed GM catchment.

Advice to parents on how to make requests for establishing further Gaelic Medium Education as set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 has been incorporated within the Highland Council website.

A number of primary and secondary school transport routes are combined with public bus services across THC area, and this has been the case for many years. Although parents are often apprehensive when such arrangements are planned, generally there are very few issues in practice. The Council allows but does not require operators to register their services as public service routes to enhance transport provision in the area, provided they ensure there is enough seating capacity with seatbelts for every entitled pupil.

In order to make travelling on high school buses safer for primary age pupils, we can assign specific seats in the front of the bus to be reserved for

primary pupils. Also the High School could nominate bus monitors, and we would encourage this. Monitors would be responsible for ensuring everyone was travelling safely in their seats with their seatbelts on and in return could be issued with onward travel elsewhere (depending on the contractor) or perhaps some other incentives at school. They would be responsible for reporting any issues with the vehicle or route as well as reporting on behaviour of passengers.

Issue 10

The council should also be clear on how their proposal supports the expansion of funded free hours being available through Gaelic for children aged three to five years.

Response 10

Currently there is full 1140 hours per annum provision through Gaelic available at Acharacle School Nursery.

Issue 11

The educational benefit statement should include how the proposal is going to help the council meet their Gaelic language plan targets for the secondary stages. This is as part of a progressive 3-18 immersion curriculum.

Response 11

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 12

The educational benefits statement should include how all children and young people in English Medium can learn Gaelic regularly and progressively as a means to promote equity. In doing this, there should be clarity on the different outcomes from Gaelic (Learners) and Gaelic Medium Education.

Response 12

Gaelic is L2 for schools across the ASG.

For Acharacle and Kilchoan primaries, the Expectations & Outcomes are followed by the class teachers and staff use Go Gaelic as the main resource. Staff can access GL training. The school ensures they have access to Fèis musicians who promote Gaelic, singing tutors, participation in the Mod. In Kilchoan there is also have a retired teacher volunteer (pre Covid restrictions) who comes in weekly. This year they are also using CNAG and drama tutors to provide GL sessions alongside GM. Gaelic language is used and promoted in the general language of the schools – greetings, basic phrases, songs, stories of the local culture.

At Strontian PS, EM pupils have Gaelic as L2. Go Gaelic is also the main resource. Basic Gaelic is embedded across the school. The school are investigating further engagement with Feis tutors and have contributed to the on-line Mod concert with support of a Gaelic Singing Tutor. This is now continuing through the YMI initiative to provide regular Gaelic singing for P5-7.

Ardnamurchan High School has a strong ethos of equity between Gaelic and English with all pupils taking Gaelic throughout the BGE. Gaelic is the majority language for uptake in the Senior Phase and the school holds regular Gaelic Assemblies. Film G is embedded in the curriculum, and staff model the use of Gaelic wherever possible. Gaelic Medium pupils are taught separately from learners, (for both language and social subjects in the BGE) but Film G, Mod and assemblies provide opportunity for all to share in the school's Gaelic Ethos.

Staff in Lochaline and Ardgour have worked towards gaining greater knowledge/skills in Gaelic as part of their career long professional learning

to develop their confidence when delivering Gaelic to children. Staff have access to a range of Gaelic resources.

In Ardgour, nursery staff also deliver Gaelic rhyme-time sessions.

Issue 13

The council, working with the senior leaders within the associated school group, should have a clear strategy to promote the benefits and opportunities for Gaelic Medium Education in an ongoing, robust way.

Response 13

Highland Council is the largest provider of Gaelic Medium Education in Scotland. Our Education service has 203 schools in total, covering a geographical area nearly the size of Belgium. The area is a mix of urban, semi urban and rural areas and we have ambition to provide opportunities for Gaelic across the whole region. Over the last year, the Council has increased the profile of Gaelic, invested in the team, established a Gaelic Committee and Gaelic is embedded in the Council's Executive Leadership Team, led by an Executive Chief Officer. This reflects that the Council is committed to growing and developing the GM and GL Education sector; Gaelic learning and curriculum development; and Gaelic culture and communities.

The Council plans to focus on growth in ELC and 0-3, curriculum development, support to ASN, and focus on language use within our communities for both our children and our fragile communities to ensure Gaelic has a sustained and strong presence. These are the key priorities within our projects over the next year and beyond.

Challenges include our geography, demographics with a declining population and the protection of our fragile Gaelic communities. Growth in GME is impacted by a lack of probationer allocation teachers, difficulty in recruiting Gaelic teachers and a narrowing of curriculum choice at the senior phase. An understanding of our challenges helps us direct our resources and this re-invigoration of our ambition for Gaelic means that we feel with additional resource, we have a good opportunity to make a positive lasting impact.

Despite the challenges of COVID, the Council was able to demonstrate flexibility and sustained commitment to Gaelic through the provision of a program of adjusted delivery. It was able to maintain a good level of engagement and developed tools and approaches adopted as best practice elsewhere.

There is now a need to focus on providing support where it is needed following the interruption to the total immersion phase and the likely confidence gap which may have impacted on our pupils in GME.

The Highland Council's third generation Gaelic Language Plan 2018-2023 was submitted to Bòrd na Gàidhlig on September 18th, 2017. The Plan has been developed under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. The Highland Council has received statutory approval from Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

The Plan has 6 priority areas which are as follows:

1. Gaelic in the Home, Early Learning and Childcare
2. Gaelic in the Community
3. Gaelic in Education
4. Gaelic in the Arts, Culture and Heritage
5. Gaelic in the Workplace
6. The Social, Economic and Cultural Value of Gaelic

The specific Strategic Commitments within each Priority Areas are bulleted below.

Further details on outcomes and promotion of Priority Area 1, 2 and 3 outlined under Outcomes and Promotion section below.

Priority Area 1. Gaelic in the Home, Early Learning and Childcare

- Continue to support Highland partnerships to create resources to encourage and support parents or guardians in using Gaelic in the home and early learning and childcare provision.

Priority Area 2. Gaelic in the Community

- Provide opportunities to encourage and increase the use of Gaelic in the community.
- Contribute to and support Community Partnership Development Plans and link with existing groups to promote and support an inclusive approach to Gaelic, within Locality Plans.
- Continue to support and advise community groups in relation to Gaelic development and usage.

Priority Area 3. Gaelic in Education

- Contribute to national strategic partnership initiatives and policy formulation across Gaelic education.
- Ensure that Gaelic education is embedded in The Highland Council's Strategic Education Improvement Planning.
- Build on established partnerships to continue to grow a professionally organised and trained staff to support the 0–3 Early Learning and Childcare sector.
- Develop 3–18 Gaelic Education through a systematic and sustainable approach to increase the percentage of Gaelic Learners in establishments.
- Work with partners to review the learning materials and learning resources provided to support Gaelic Education.

Priority Area 4. Gaelic Arts, Culture and Heritage

- Engage with partners and contribute to national strategic initiatives and policy formulation for Gaelic in the arts, culture and heritage sectors.

- Increase the profile and usage of Gaelic within Council-funded organisations and events across the Highlands.
- Develop opportunities for people to engage with Gaelic through the arts and creative industries.

The Council will:

- i. Participate in the work of the National Gaelic Arts Strategy.
- ii. Work with Fèisean nan Gàidheal and Fèis Rois through our Service Delivery Contracts, to support Fèisean based in the Highlands in promoting and increasing Gaelic in their outputs.
- iii. Work with High Life Highland and partners to raise the profile and increase the usage and visibility of Gaelic throughout visitor attractions, leisure facilities, museums, archive centres and at events.

Priority Area 5. Gaelic in the Workplace

- Continue to increase the status, profile, awareness and usage of Gaelic across all Council services.
- Identify and provide opportunities for Elected Members and Officers to learn Gaelic and improve their linguistic competence, to increase Gaelic usage.
- Increase opportunities to raise the profile and use of Gaelic when working with external partners and relevant stakeholders.

Ardnamurchan High School is able to promote the Gaelic ethos to all pupils across the peninsula through transition, curriculum and events.

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 There would be no effect on school transport within the Acharacle PS catchment.

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 There was an alleged inaccuracy at paragraph 9.1 of the Proposal Paper, which is addressed at Response 8 above.

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. Response 8 above sets out the Council's reason for coming to this conclusion.

11.0 Overall Review of Consultation Exercise

- 11.1 This consultation exercise generated a better response than others of this type, and the public meeting was relatively well-attended.
- 11.2 The point most consistently made in response was that the catchment area of Ardgour Primary School should be included within the GM catchment for Acharacle Primary School. The Council has responded to these representations, as set out in Response 5 above, and paragraph 13.3 below.

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 Acharacle 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 Acharacle Primary School offers educational benefits and should be implemented, but with an expanded catchment area from that set out in the Proposal Paper. The revised GM catchment area for Acharacle PS should overlay the current EM catchments for Acharacle PS, Strontian PS, Kilchoan PS, and Ardgour PS. A revised catchment map can be found at **Appendix 6**. Lochaline PS will remain outside the new GM catchment, both because of the distances involved in travel and because local parents are seeking GM provision within Lochaline PS itself.

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

31 January 2022