

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by HM Inspectors of Education addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to establish a Gaelic Medium Education catchment area for Acharacle Primary School. This new catchment will overlay the current English Medium catchments of Acharacle Primary School, Strontian Primary School and Kilchoan Primary School.

The proposal also formalises the current arrangements relating to Gaelic Medium Education in Ardnamurchan High School, under which the catchment area for Ardnamurchan High School will apply to both Gaelic Medium and English Medium Education.

November 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 catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education. 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 2010 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 29 September 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
- virtual 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](#). The formal consultation ran from 23 August 2021 to 8 October 2021. The proposal paper was distributed to a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties. Interested parties were invited to respond to the statutory consultation by letter or electronically. This attracted eight responses. Bòrd na Gàidhlig as a statutory consultee supported the proposals. They asked that the council have a clear plan for introducing Gaelic Medium Education at Ardgor and Lochaline Primary Schools, based on parental interest. Comann nam Pàrant recognised that the proposal had potential to attract parents to Gaelic Medium Education. They stated that this is not equivalent to Gaelic Medium Education being available in each locality. Children and young people's views at the primary stages were sought. This included children who learnt through Gaelic and English. They expressed their passion for learning the language and were clear of the resulting benefits. Across English and Gaelic Medium Education, children spoke of long travel distances to school and the impact of road conditions on

that travel. Children were clear that Gaelic Medium Education should be available to those who wished to choose this pathway in Scottish education. Those in English Medium Education recognised the value of their learning of Gaelic as an additional language.

2.2 The council hosted a virtual public meeting. Officers set a rationale for the proposals, discussed high-level educational benefits and invited attendee views. There were 18 in attendance at this meeting. Attendees' concerns centred on:

- legislation for setting up new Gaelic Medium provisions;
- promotion to parents of Gaelic Medium Education;
- the area of the proposed Gaelic Medium catchment; and
- how the proposal helps the council to meet their target to increase the number of young people in Gaelic Medium Education.

2.3 Additional collective themes raised across written and oral responses are:

- all primaries of the Ardnamurchan associated school group being included in the catchment area;
- setting up of new provisions for Gaelic Medium Education; and
- sustaining education in a rural area.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 This proposal by The Highland Council, if agreed, formalises the existing catchment area for Ardnamurchan High School as also applying to Gaelic Medium Education. This covers a rural area. The distances to travel necessitate accommodation away from home for some young people at the secondary stages during the week. There is one nursery and one primary provision for Gaelic Medium Education within the associated school group for Ardnamurchan High School. These are based at Acharacle Primary School. The proposal suggests that the Acharacle Primary School's existing catchment area is extended to include that of Strontian Primary School and Kilchoan Primary School. This would form a catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education. This leaves two associated primary schools out with the proposed catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education. These are Lochaline and Ardgour Primary Schools. The council's discretion for not including all of the schools is that children would have to travel long distances. A majority of stakeholders who engaged with this consultation agreed with how the council had included only some primary schools within the proposed catchment areas. However, there are a number of ways that the council can reduce possible adverse effects.

3.2 HM Inspectors are of the view that there are equity and equality issues that should inform the council's future strategic planning, should the proposal be progressed. Almost all stakeholders are very positive about the growth of Gaelic Medium Education within the associated school group. The nursery provision is wholly delivered through Gaelic at this time. This is based on parental demand. Most children at Acharacle Primary School are opting to learn through Gaelic. Specialists at the secondary school are increasing ways for young people to learn through Gaelic. The council should analyse the factors underpinning these successes to support further growth of Gaelic in the associated school group. This may help to ensure that all parents within this associated school group, who wish to access Gaelic Medium Education, are enabled to do so. At the public meeting, possible interest in setting up a Gaelic Medium Education provision at Lochaline Primary School was expressed by parents. The council has stated that they will

investigate this further. They should also provide reassurances on how they will reduce potential barriers to 'at least five children' being required to set up a new Gaelic Medium Education, as stated in statutory guidance. The required number of children is reported as not being feasible or achievable in this rural area. Whilst there is a process laid out in legislation, the local authority themselves can initiate new Gaelic Medium provisions where interest exists. In so doing, they should take account of rural contexts. A view was expressed that much more could be done to promote Gaelic Medium Education with parents on a regular and robust way. This is a statutory duty.

3.3 Senior 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 Ardgour Primary School 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 Ardgour 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.

3.4 For some children learning through English, equity translates to them having access to quality and progressive learning of Gaelic as an additional language. This pathway also makes an important contribution to meeting targets for the council's planning for Gaelic. It is also integral to the 'Ardnamurchan identity'. The educational benefit 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.

3.5 The council's final report, should the proposal go ahead, needs to include arrangements for duty of care and safeguarding for children making long journeys on buses to access Gaelic Medium Education.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors have considered The Highland Council's proposal to establish catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education at Ardnamurchan High School and Acharacle Primary School. HM Inspectors agree that the proposal has potential to result in educational benefits. However, there are a few aspects of the proposal still to be considered. This is to ensure that all learners progressing to Ardnamurchan High School have equity and equality in their learning of and through Gaelic. 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 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.

**HM Inspectors
November 2021**