



## **HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

### **EDUCATION AND LEARNING SERVICE**

#### **REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH GAELIC MEDIUM CATCHMENT AREAS FOR PLOCKTON PRIMARY SCHOOL AND LOHCARRON PRIMARY SCHOOL**

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal to establish Gaelic Medium (GM) catchment areas for Plockton Primary School and Lochcarron 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 8 December 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.

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## **1.0 Background**

1.1 Highland Council's Education Committee, at its meeting on 24 February 2022, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to establish Gaelic Medium catchment areas for Plockton Primary School and Lochcarron Primary School.

1.2 The Proposal Paper suggested that the new GM catchment for Plockton PS will overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of Plockton Primary School, Kyle of Lochalsh Primary School, Kyleakin Primary School, Auchtertyre Primary School, and Loch Duich Primary School. Particular arrangements will apply for transport to Plockton from the other catchment areas. The new GM catchment for Lochcarron PS will be identical to the school's English Medium catchment.

1.3 The Proposal Paper also suggested formalising the current arrangements relating to Gàidhlig Medium Education (GME) in Plockton High School, under which the catchment area for Plockton 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. **Appendices B** and **C** are also appendices to the original proposal.

## 2.0 Consultation process

2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Tuesday 1 March 2022 to Friday 29 April 2022. 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 Plockton Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (ii) Parents of pupils attending Lochcarron Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (iii) Parents of pupils attending Kyle of Lochalsh Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (iv) Parents of pupils attending Kyleakin Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (v) Parents of pupils attending Auchtertyre Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (vi) Parents of pupils attending Loch Duich Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (vii) Parents of pupils attending Glenelg Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (viii) Parents of pupils attending Applecross Primary School; including parents of pre-school pupils.
- (ix) The Parent Councils of each of the above schools, and the Parent Council of Plockton High School.
- (x) All staff of the schools listed above.
- (xi) Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
- (xii) Trade union representatives.
- (xiii) All Community Councils for the areas covered by the Proposal.
- (xiv) Bòrd na Gàidhlig.
- (xv) Comann nam Pàrant.
- (xvi) Education Scotland.

2.3 The proposal document was advertised on the Highland Council website.

2.4 A public meeting was held online on 9 March 2022. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website and in the *West Highland Free Press*. The note of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.

2.5 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-3xi**. Four responses were submitted on behalf of organisations (Comann nam Pàrant, Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Dornie and District Community Council, and Applecross Community Council). The other 7 responses were all from individual parents/local residents. One of these requested that the response be treated as confidential to Highland councillors and Council officials, so has been circulated separately from the appendices to this Report.

### 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

Support the initiative to promote Gaelic Medium Catchment, but it is not in the best interests of the pupils to have such a centralised approach forcing the kids to travel out of school. Due to the geography of the area and the same centralisation to access a town by bad roads, kids already have to travel during the week to practice sport and activities creating tiredness. Add into the week almost an hour of bus travel is unlikely to be in the interest of the Pupils and worst it could strongly limit their motivation to practice Gaelic.

It is clearly in the best interest of the pupils AND Gaelic promotion to decentralise by creating more local "hubs".

It would be good to see a review of GME in Lochalsh as the numbers are increasing at Plockton. After summer there will be 5 children travelling an hour by bus to the school. The nursery is at capacity and parents are having to delay entry or look at alternative education settings.

Travelling times may continue to be a deterrent to families in some parts of the proposed catchment and it may be the case that parents request GMPE provision in another school within the catchment at a future date. We would consider such a request to be reasonable, given the distances and travel times for some families to Plockton Primary, in particular from the Loch Duich catchment.

Transport concerns coupled with the fact the Sgoil Araich is already at capacity with parents having to delay entry and look for alternative nurseries I think highlights a requirement to perhaps have a review of the setting for GME in the area with a view to looking at whether another more

central setting would provide a greater reach, making GM far more accessible. I believe this would be a huge step forward for the future of the Gaelic language in this area.

I would welcome a review of GME provision in Lochalsh. The numbers in Plockton have increased and as of August there will be 5 children travelling approximately 1 hour by bus. The nursery is currently at capacity and parents are having to look at alternative provisions.

I am aware the proposed catchment area is not changing. This is unfortunate that due to travelling times with the school being in Plockton it excludes Glenelg. Otherwise the catchment area is suitable.

I feel the caveat that the transport is to be the same as the high schools is a major issue. This means that the proposed method of transport for the Auchtertyre and Loch Duich catchment areas will result in 4- and 5-year-olds travelling for well over an hour and transferring at the high school with older students having responsibility for them. The current set up is a deterrent to GME and places very young children into potentially dangerous situations. This has probably never been an issue before as uptake from these areas was limited. But also this is probably why uptake was limited as its a massive sacrifice for parent and children to send them so far. Especially on a high school bus.

It would be ideal to see a review of GME in Lochalsh as the numbers are increasing at Plockton. After summer there will be 5 children travelling an hour by bus to the school. With 2 more the year after. The nursery is at capacity and parents are having to delay entry or look at alternative education settings. This is causing unrest in the village as families local to Plockton are having to send their children to Auchtertyre or Kyle as the demand for Sgoil Araich is increasing.

### **Response 1**

Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education has been published by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which lays down a process by which parents can request an assessment of the need for Gaelic medium primary education (GMPE) in their local area. This would apply to any school within the Plockton ASG, and parents from Applecross recently made such a request.

The process is set out on the Highland Council website:

[Making a request for Gaelic Medium Primary Education in your local area | Gaelic medium education | The Highland Council](#)

GME is currently offered at two of the eight primary schools in the ASG, and we have sought to create a third at Applecross, in response to a request from local parents. The Plockton ASG is therefore well-provisioned with GME, relative to most others in Highland. It remains open to parents

though, to request additional provision provided the minimum criteria are met. This issue is discussed further at Response 7.

## **Issue 2**

It is very fair to include Kyleakin within this arrangement. However, consideration needs to be given to the transport situation especially as the role in Plockton Primary increases. My daughter is in Gaelic medium in Plockton Primary and the only reason I considered this is because I have an older daughter at the high school who helps her when necessary with the transport. There have been times when she has needed to get 3 buses to get to school. At one point she was changing buses at a junction with a main road. She now gets a separate bus from her sister although they both leave from the same place and go to Plockton High school (surely this is not cost effective). She leaves our house just after 8 in the morning and isn't home till after 4. Considering the school is only 6 miles from our house this seems an unnecessarily long day.

The transition from one bus to another is a worry for many parents, with quite a few choosing not to put their children on the bus. This therefore leads to a bigger build-up of cars by the school which has little space. As you consider this change in catchment area a change in bus arrangements needs to be part of the discussion. There is definitely a strong argument for a separate bus for Gaelic medium pupils which would guarantee a safer and quicker (and potentially more cost effective) means of transport to school.

We would like to pass on our concerns with the lack of suitable transport and the longer journey time (one hour) from the Dornie & Inverinate area for these young children to the Plockton GM unit. In summary the current arrangement of using the high school bus and secondary minibus at Plockton High is not suitable.

We appreciate the consultation is solely with the catchment area but access & travel to GM is an important factor which must be considered by Highland Council to achieve equality to all.

While I do not disagree with the proposed catchment area, I have concerns about the proposed method of transport for the Auchtertyre and Loch Duich catchment areas. The current set up is a deterrent to GME as the length of the journey is too long by the current transport arrangement, and forces children into uncomfortable and potentially dangerous situations by having to transfer at the high school.

We are aware of the current issues with transport for some pupils currently travelling to GME in Plockton Primary and it will be essential that parental concerns be addressed in order to encourage uptake of GME from all areas of the proposed catchment.

I am in agreement with the proposed catchment area in general, however, I have concerns regarding the current transport arrangements in place. With the current arrangements in place, my child travelling in the High School transport, she would be required to change buses twice, with the first change currently involving a five-minute wait at a bus stop next to a very busy main road, her journey taking just over an hour. Obviously, I am assuming adjustments will be made before she starts.

I do not object to the proposed catchment area for Plockton Primary. However I do hold some concerns regarding the proposed method of travel for young pupils. The current set up utilising high school transport requires pupils to transfer at the high school to complete their journey to the Primary.

This transfer at the high school is a potentially dangerous situation as it involves young children who arrive on several different high school buses transferring unsupervised onto one minibus to complete their journey to the primary school. This step also extends what can already be a long journey. I think this is a barrier to people considering GME.

### **Response 2**

Since these issues were raised the transport contracts have been re-tendered. The primary school age pupils from Auchtertyre, Dornie, Inverinate etc are now able to travel on the bus from Glenelg to Plockton HS, which is the vehicle that continues on to Plockton PS. This has adequately addressed the main concern of the parents of children travelling from the Dornie and Auchtertyre direction.

Journeys to GME from other parts of the ASG will continue to use transport to Plockton HS, with a changeover at Plockton High. The rural nature of the Highlands means that there are large areas where it is only practical, for both financial and logistical reasons, to run one vehicle for the children in an area. From an environmental perspective, not running additional vehicles also keeps the levels of emissions down. This means that Plockton High School and primary school aged children are required to travel on one bus. With the lack of services available in rural areas, together with an increasing reduction in driver availability, this is something that is likely to become more common rather than less so. The practice is common across the Highland Council area.

Transport contracts are subject to tender and within the ASG the precise configuration of school transport will vary according to the number of pupils travelling and their home addresses. The Council normally tries to balance convenience with efficiency,

### **Issue 3**

Comann nam Pàrant welcomes the formalisation of school catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education (GME) for Plockton and Lochcarron Primary

Schools. The setting of a catchment area will provide clarification for parents on their entitlement to GME, and although this is not the equivalent of having provision in each locality, we hope it will encourage more families to consider GME.

**Response 3**

The Council notes and welcomes this response.

**Issue 4**

As more families commit to GME, for pupils to have continuity in Gaelic provision 3-18, the GM on offer in Plockton High School must be developed.

**Response 4**

Highland Council's Gaelic Language Plan outlines strategic priorities for GME Education in line with the National Plan. This includes providing support towards developing the offer of Gaelic Medium Immersion in Secondary Gaelic Medium Education within the scope of the resources available in which to deliver on this priority.

**Issue 5**

In the proposed Lochcarron catchment we note the exclusion of Applecross and hope that the recent request for GMPE in Applecross will result in delivery of GME in Applecross Primary School.

**Response 5**

The Highland Council can confirm that a post for a Gaelic Medium Primary Teacher for Applecross Primary School was advertised to help establish this new GMPE Provision. The recruitment was unsuccessful and a second attempt to recruit is currently in process. No changes can be made to provision at the school until a teacher has been appointed.

**Issue 6**

We agree that Lochcarron is too far for Applecross primary children to travel for Gaelic medium (and anyway Applecross would not be in the Lochcarron catchment area).

**Response 6**

The Council notes and agrees with this comment.

**Issue 7**

1. The Bòrd in principle agrees with the defining of catchment areas for the Plockton ASG.
2. Bòrd na Gàidhlig does not agree with the statement in 7.10 that existing travel arrangements are acceptable for GME services in the Plockton ASG.
3. Bòrd na Gàidhlig proposes that a full strategic review of GME service provision for the Plockton, Lochcarron, Loch Duich, Glenelg and Applecross areas should now take place with a focus on the following issues:
  - i) Transport arrangements for all GME services which review time for travel, safety issues, weather dependant routes and the complexity of travel (including multiple bus changes).
  - ii) The provision and development of GME across the area, including developing GME provision in Applecross and Glenelg and developing GME Early Years Services. We note GME Early Years provision is now at capacity in Plockton and requires further development (5.5)
  - iii) Continuity of provision across 3-18 should be at the heart of the strategic review. We note the comment in 8.4 regarding transition drop out and recommend that issues relating to transition are addressed quickly.
  - iv) The strategic review engages with parents and the community in devising a plan to incrementally develop GME services across the area and that evidence of success is closely monitored to ensure that the percentage of parents opting for GME increases annually.

**Response 7**

Response 1 above sets out that it is possible for any parent to request the provision of GME in their local school, provided there is evidence of demand.

Highland Council regularly audits its provision of GME as part of its annual reporting to the Scottish Government about the number of pupils accessing GME. In addition, the staggered exercise creating GM catchment areas across Highland has in each case, resulted in a review of the numbers involved in each ASG, and of the school capacity available.

The Plockton ASG contains 8 primary schools, all of which are small rural schools. The current rolls for each school are as follows.

Applecross PS - 12  
 Auchtertyre PS – 48  
 Glenelg PS – 11  
 Kyle of Lochalsh PS – 31

Kyleakin PS - 33  
 Loch Duich PS – 15  
 Lochcarron PS - 56  
 Plockton PS - 39

Currently therefore, there are a total of 245 primary school pupils in the ASG. Relative to other ASGs in Highland, the Plockton ASG is well-served with GME, as it is offered in two of the eight primary schools. Of the 29 ASGs in Highland, the Portree High School Group has the largest number of primary schools offering GME, but the Plockton ASG is the only other that offers GME in more than one primary school. The area is therefore relatively well-served with GM provision at present, and the small rolls of the local schools tend to militate against further expansion.

At national level, there are ongoing recruitment pressures relating to Gaelic teachers to staff GME, and conducting a review of GM provision within the Plockton ASG would run the risk of engendering expectations that would be difficult for the Authority to meet.

For the above reason, the Council does not, at present, propose to undertake a specific review of the provision of GME within the Plockton ASG.

The percentages of pupils attending GME are reported bi-annually to Scottish Government. Where numbers are seen to be decreasing, the Gaelic Team in the Highland Council, work closely with the school and community to address the reasons for any potential decrease.

The numbers of GME pupils in both Lochcarron and Plockton Primary schools has increased by an overall of 8 pupils in the last session. Applecross Primary School is currently actively recruiting a GME teacher. This evidences that Highland Council is incrementally developing GME across the area.

### **Issue 8**

I disagree with item 11.1 that there is not expected to have any impact on the wider local communities, either at Plockton or Lochcarron. The proposal will have a negative impact on Applecross Community, as access to GME will not be available.

Applecross has a strong Gaelic culture and heritage. Gaelic language was once a key part of our community, however currently there are no people under 30 who speak Gaelic. I believe that without access to GME, the language is at risk of being lost in our community forever.

**Response 8**

The Council is sympathetic to these concerns, and has sought to recruit a teacher to deliver GME at Applecross PS. See Response 5.

The nature of the journey between Applecross and Lochcarron means it is not practical to include Applecross within the Lochcarron GM catchment.

4.2 The note of the public meeting is at Appendix 2. All of the questions raised concerned the transport issues that were also raised in the written responses.

**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 agree that the council's proposal is of educational benefit to children and parents who reside within the catchment areas for Plockton High School. The proposal gives clarity to parents on how to access Gaelic Medium Education. They added that the council needs to specify safe and reasonable travel arrangements in its final report, and that the Council should also share more of its long-term local vision for the curriculum through Gaelic.

5.3 The transport issue raised by Education Scotland is addressed in Section 4 above.

5.4 The Council's long-term vision for Gaelic Education (which includes Gaelic learner as well as Gaelic Medium education) is set out in the Council's Gaelic Language Plan, and includes the following targets:

- 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](http://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.

## **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 Since receiving representations on the subject of school transport, the Council has responded by implementing new arrangements in respect of pupils from the Inverinate, Dornie and Auchtertyre areas, as requested by the parents. In other respects, the proposal does not change the existing arrangements for school transport.

## **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 were no alleged omissions or inaccuracies.

## **11.0 Overall Review of Consultation Exercise**

11.1 With respect to the Lochcarron element of the consultation, there is general agreement that the exclusion of Applecross from the GM catchment is inevitable due to the nature of the route between the two communities. The community of Applecross has made a request for GME in Applecross PS. The Council has sought to deliver this, but at the time of writing had not been able to recruit a member of staff.

11.2 With respect to the Plockton element of the consultation, there was no disagreement about the scope of the GM catchment. All of the issues raised in consultation concerned the transport arrangements to GME at Plockton Primary School. The Council has managed to address some of these concerns, although in considering this issue, the Council must take a balance between convenience and cost to the taxpayer.

11.3 Some of those who responded to the consultation suggested that the Council should review the provision of GME in the Lochalsh area. As set out in Response 1 above, it is open to parents to formally request the provision of GME in their local school, provided there is evidence of demand.

## **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 held discussions with relevant consultees 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 GM catchment areas for Plockton Primary School and Lochcarron 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**

**1 November 2022**