

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to:

- **establish a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Mount Pleasant Primary School. This catchment area will overlay the current English Medium catchment areas for Mount Pleasant Primary School, Miller Academy Primary School, Pennyland Primary School, Castletown Primary School, Crossroads Primary School, Halkirk Primary School and Reay Primary School. Particular arrangements will apply for transport to and from Thurso for the catchment areas of the latter four primary schools; and**
- **in anticipation of establishing Gaelic Medium Education in Thurso High School from 2020-21 onwards, to recognise that the catchment area for Thurso High School will apply to both Gaelic and English Medium Education from August 2020 onwards.**

September 2019

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 (GME) for Mount Pleasant Primary School. In preparation for children progressing to Thurso High School, the catchment area for Thurso High School will apply to Gaelic and English Medium Education from August 2020 onwards. 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:

- 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;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- visits to Mount Pleasant Primary School and Thurso High School to discuss the proposal with relevant consultees across the proposed catchment areas.

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 consultation process ran from 4 June 2019 to 30 August 2019. During that time, the council held a public meeting at Mount Pleasant Primary School. The meeting was attended by 19 members of the public, as well as members of the council and a representative from Bòrd na Gàidhlig. Announcements were placed in the local press and on the council's online services. Statutory consultees, including parents/carers, children, staff and Bòrd na Gàidhlig were informed of the consultation. The council published documentation for the consultation on its website. They also distributed papers to a full range of stakeholders and interested parties.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The Highland Council is proposing to establish catchment areas for GME to comply with legislation. Almost all consultees, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig, were supportive of the proposal. They recognised that with some further work, the proposal will clarify how GME is obtained within Thurso High School's Associated School Group.

3.2 The council's statement of educational benefits references the advantages of bilingualism and fluency in Gaelic. A number of consultees felt that more children and young people would benefit from this proposal through better promotion of GME.

3.3 Consultees agreed that it was useful that the proposal detailed some of the transport arrangements for children and young people accessing GME. Should the proposal be implemented, the council needs to give more detail of the safe transporting of children to and from Mount Pleasant Primary School when starting and finishing times vary from that of Thurso High School.

3.4 Consultees were proud of the fluency in Gaelic that the children in GME at Mount Pleasant Primary School were acquiring. At this stage, stakeholders' confidence is diminished due to the lack of clarity on how progression in GME will be advanced at the secondary stages. Parents also requested that effective transition arrangements be put in place to support children's wellbeing and learning as they move from primary to secondary. Going forward, the educational benefit statement should more strategically capture how a 3-18 GME curriculum strengthens the rationale for drawing up catchment areas. This should fully involve parents and partners, and be a shared narrative of how this proposal realises more detailed educational benefits for children and young people learning through Gaelic and English.

4. Summary

Overall, the council's proposal has potential to result in educational benefits for GME. Consultees do have some justifiable concerns, which the council needs to address in its final report. These centre on promotion of GME, transport and taking forward 3-18 GME as a continuum of learning.

**HM Inspectors
September 2019**