

CONSULTATION MEETING – PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH GAELIC MEDIUM CATCHMENT AREAS FOR BUN-SGOIL GHÀIDHLIG INBHIR NIS, INVERNESS ROYAL ACADEMY, DINGWALL PRIMARY SCHOOL, DINGWALL ACADEMY, MILLBANK PRIMARY SCHOOL, AND NAIRN ACADEMY

HELD AT MILLBANK PRIMARY SCHOOL – 5 SEPTEMBER 2023 – 6.30pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Panel

Cllr. Paul Oldham - Chairperson
Ian Jackson, Education Officer, Resources
Fiona Shearer, Area Education Manager
Lena Walker, Gaelic Education Support Officer

In Attendance

Louise Kinnear, Head Teacher, Millbank Primary School
Julie MacDonald, Head Teacher, Nairn Academy
Holly Souter, Teacher of Gàidhlig, Nairn Academy
Donald Paterson, Education Scotland
12 members of the public

The Chairperson – Cllr. Paul Oldham introduced himself as Vice-Chair of the Local Area Committee and welcomed everyone to the consultation meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal to formally establish a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Millbank Primary School, Nairn Academy, and other schools, as set out in the recommendation to the proposal Paper.

The Proposal has been issued as a result of statutory guidance on Gaelic Education, produced by Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

The Council officials present tonight were Ian Jackson, Education Officer, (Resources); Fiona Shearer, Area Education Manager; and Lena Walker, Gaelic Education Support Officer.

The Chairperson then invited Ian Jackson to describe the consultation process and the detailed reasons for issuing the Proposal.

Mr Jackson

As indicated by the Chairperson, the Council is required to introduce GM catchment areas under the terms of Statutory Guidance issued by BnaG. The setting up of a

catchment area involves a statutory consultation, of which this meeting was part. We are currently in the initial phase of that consultation, which is due to end on Friday 27 October, and anyone who wants to submit views in writing should do so by that date. The purpose of tonight's meeting is to gather views, and we will try to answer any questions that are raised.

The formal process has a number of stages and gives ample opportunity for views to be expressed to the Council before any final decision is made. Once the public consultation ends on 27 October, Education Scotland becomes involved. They will look at the Proposal Paper, the note of the meeting tonight, and any written representations, and will form a view on the educational benefits of the proposal. Education Scotland will contact Millbank Primary and Nairn Academy, and they will be keen to hear from any parents who wish to make their views known. The Council has to take account of Education Scotland's view on the educational benefits and respond to any points raised by their report, as well as any representations received as a result of the consultation process. Following the completion of that stage, the Council will prepare a Report reviewing the consultation exercise and present it to the Council's Education Committee. The Review Report will be published at least 3 weeks before it is submitted to Committee, and anyone who responded in writing to the initial consultation will be invited to make "further representations" during those 3 weeks. Any further representations that are made are submitted to the members of the Committee, either in advance or tabled on the day, so that members are fully informed of any issues that may have arisen. Members will also see copies of the original responses and the note of this meeting.

Because of the Statutory Guidance we mentioned earlier, the Council has to set up Gaelic Medium catchments. What is up for debate is its extent of that catchment. The GM catchment we are proposing for Millbank Primary is the same as the catchment for Nairn Academy, meaning that children will be eligible to enrol in GME at Millbank if they live within the EM catchments of Millbank, Rosebank, Auldearn and Cawdor Primary Schools. For Nairn Academy, the GM catchment will be identical to the school's EM catchment. Up to now there has been a "custom and practice" arrangement in respect of any children who wanted to attend Gaelic Medium education. To an extent therefore, this Proposal is simply formalising arrangements which have already been operating in practice.

In respect of BSGI/IRA, the proposed GM catchment covers all the primary schools within the catchments of IRA, Charleston, Culloden, IHS, and Millburn. We also propose to include two primary school catchments in the Fortrose ASG - North Kessock and Avoch. The Millbank Primary/Nairn Academy catchment will cover the Nairn ASG.

Although we are making this Proposal primarily in response to the statutory guidance on Gaelic Education, we also feel that the Proposal has educational benefits in

promoting the Gaelic language and bilingualism. My colleague Lena Walker will talk more about that in a few moments.

In summary, the benefit of the Proposal is that we're giving clarity to parents in respect of GME, making clear where entitlement exists and where it doesn't exist, and that's an improvement on the existing arrangements based on custom and practice.

The Chairperson then invited Lena Walker to outline the educational benefits of GME

Mrs Walker introduced the 3 frameworks used by Highland Council in terms of the Gaelic curriculum. Gaelic advice from Education Scotland is that we use to determine our curriculum in schools. The statutory Gaelic Language Plan is our corporate plan but it has a lengthy education section with outcomes that are currently under review. We are moving into a new Gaelic Language Plan which will have outcomes relating to promoting Gaelic education, supporting teacher networks and the wider aspects of 3-18 education. Finally, we have the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, which Ian has explained, which gives advice on GM catchments amongst other things. Gaelic education is demand-led and has been established in Nairn for a number of years now. We have a sustainable provision in the primary school and a new teacher in the secondary school. If there are any questions about the curriculum, I would be happy to take them.

The Chairperson opened the meeting to the floor.

Q1 – I am a parent of a GM P6 pupil and an S1 pupil at Nairn Academy. I've submitted a written reply to the consultation online. My concern is that my daughter has gone through GME at primary and has gone to Nairn Academy because it is our local school and there was no opportunity for me to access transport to IRA. I want my daughter to continue with GME, and she is keen to continue, but she is currently getting 3 lessons per week, in Gaelic language, but no other subject, and with no other European language on offer. Information I had from Nairn Academy at the end of last year was that Gaelic had to be planned for, they had to recruit a teacher, which they have and that's great, but the timetabling for Gaelic has been at the expense of French. That's a real disappointment. I feel that when you are saying "this is the Nairn Academy catchment, for GME, and this is the IRA catchment" the playing fields are not level. What is being offered for GME at IRA is different from the level of GME being offered at Nairn Academy, and that's where it feels we are being very short-changed. I realise there are steppingstones to better GM provision, but I was very disappointed that the subject was being offered at the expense of another language, because for me part of the attraction of learning Gaelic was to enhance children's ability of learning a further language.

Follow-up from the Floor - Can I just add to that, I was with CnamP when we fought with Highland Council to get Gaelic at Nairn Academy, and it was quite a battle to get it, but it is not the same as is at Inverness. The teacher left last term

and my daughter missed a whole term of Gaelic, and that's the problem, there is GME at Nairn Academy but if the sole teacher leaves there is no Gaelic.

A1 (Lena Walker) – The advice on Gaelic education is quite clear on how to plan for Gaelic in secondary schools. It is difficult in terms of timetabling because Gaelic is additional to what would be seen in an ordinary timetable, but we can have conversations, about what access pupils have to the teacher and when that is in their timetable. We wouldn't want it to be at the expense of another modern language, so the curriculum proportionality is led by what the teacher availability is and what the timetabling looks like.

Q2 – Your definition of GME is not 3 classes per week, which is what is being offered at Nairn Academy just now, so you are not offering GME. Therefore, if you are drawing boundaries and saying, "this is the Nairn Academy catchment for GME, you cannot broach this boundary", that's not a level playing field.

A2 (Lena Walker) – Gaelic Medium education is about a proportionality of the curriculum through the medium of Gaelic. Gaelic by itself is not GME, it is about access to Gaelic. Ideally we would be looking for a proportion of the curriculum through Gaelic. There are different ways to do that – it could be thorough subject delivery, PSE experiences, social experiences through Gaelic, house groups. The immersive experience would be extended beyond Gaelic as a subject.

Q3 - I have a child in P5 and I am the chair of the local CnamP. You mentioned proportionality several times. What proportion?

A3 (Lena Walker) – There is no clear definition of what the proportion is, but more than just Gaelic as a subject would be proportional. In each school, as has been pointed out, the proportion of the curriculum offered through the medium of Gaelic varies depending on the school a pupil may attend, and that proportion is dictated by staffing, and what the availability of staff is in that school to deliver subjects through the medium of Gaelic.

Q4 – So as things stand, I believe Nairn Academy has only 0.4 FTE of a position. With the numbers of pupils we have, at present and coming up at the Academy, even if the GM classes at Millbank were at capacity, what level of funding could we expect? What would that look like if we had say, 8 kids coming in every year? Would that look like proper GME? If not, I don't think parents would accept the catchment area being fixed in this way.

A4 (Ian Jackson) – Just to go back for the moment to the reference to "setting a boundary", obviously we are setting a boundary, and the Council's school enrolment scheme is based on the idea of catchment areas and that pupils will be enrolled automatically in the designated school for their home address, whether that be for EM or GM education. However, as I am sure many of you are aware, there is a national provision for parents to make what we call placing requests for another

school. When we talk about a boundary, I just wanted to make clear that it is a somewhat permeable boundary. Placing requests are usually granted but they may not be - there is a complex set of rules around that. The default position is that they are granted and but there are some situations where they are not. I just wanted to make it clear that the option exists.

Q5 – It does, but I took the last placing request at IRA this summer. There were 60 places and I took place 60, but the circumstances of my life are such that I just could not commit to taking my daughter there and back every day, so I had to choose Nairn Academy. In the summer just ended, there were 4 P7s who left GME at Millbank. Two went to IRA and two to Nairn Academy. There would not have been spaces for all 4 to have gone to Nairn Academy, that would have been 61 pupils in S1. Ultimately therefore, one of us did not have the choice.

A5 (Ian Jackson) – There are circumstances in which placing requests are refused, I wouldn't attempt to say otherwise. I just wanted to make sure people know that the request can be made.

Q6 – I have had lots of communication with Highland Council over several months about my placing request. My daughter had her transition arrangement and the week before the schools broke up, we were advised there would be no school transport. The custom and practice arrangement that you referred to was defaulted upon at that point. At no point were we told about that, during the whole of her P7 year, and it was the end of her transition arrangement that we were informed. We chose GME because we started in the toddler group and went into P1 with GME, and it was absolutely the best choice for my daughter. However, to continue with a full choice GME, my husband and I have to take her to school, whilst the other child that went that year got transport due to their family circumstances. The impact for my daughter is that I have to drop her at 7.30am at Starbucks, and she waits there until the school building opens at 8.00am. At the other end of the day, I teach, I can't get from my school to her at that time so she goes to Asda and sits in the café to wait for me. Sometimes that's until 5.30pm. That's the impact of what you are asking children to do by drawing such a narrow catchment area, or taking away the provision of transport for children like my daughter. The child protection arrangements are a nightmare. You could say that is bad parenting by me, but I would say she has been forced into that situation to continue with her Gaelic Medium education. The alternative is she went to Nairn and didn't get GME, that I had invested in since she was a toddler. I also have two other children coming up. They will face the same situation, or their GME stops. The boundaries are unsatisfactory and what has happened to my daughter is appalling. No-one in the Council has answered the questions I have raised, even though I have submitted FOIs

A6 (Ian Jackson) – I think part of the rationale around what the Council tried to do in Nairn was that before we had GME at Nairn Academy, there was a drop-off in GME from Millbank Primary School, in that children came out of GME at Millbank and

wanted to attend their local secondary school in Nairn. Consequently we wanted to build up the provision in Nairn. I realise that the provision at Nairn Academy doesn't offer the breadth that is on offer at IRA, and that we need to build up the numbers at Nairn to rectify that. When the catchments are set, wherever they may be set, hopefully they will clarify some of these rather messy arrangements around entitlements that have been alluded to. Arguably we should have started this process 10 years ago.

Q7 (Follow-up) – Arguably you should have had a consultation before removing transport for my child.

A7 (Ian Jackson) – The Council's school transport policy is based on the principle that a pupil gets transport to their catchment school, and not to other schools. What are the public buses like between Nairn and Inverness?

Comment from the Floor – She wouldn't get to school in time – not until about 10.30am. I would need to let her off at the retail park and let her make her own way to IRA. Also, the public buses are frequently cancelled. They can't be relied upon.

(Fiona Shearer) – Feel free to get in touch with me and we can have a chat about the individual situation, but in implementing the measures when we did, we were trying to stop some of the unfairness around transport, that had happened in the past. We have tried to reduce some of the unfairness.

Comment from the Floor – The decision that the Council took, without consultation, has now adversely impacted on my child for a year.

(Fiona Shearer) – This is why I feel it is better to have this consultation, so that it will formalise the process and there will no longer be the uncertainty that exists.

Comment from the Floor – But the custom and practice arrangement that prevailed before was that transport was provided to IRA for secondary school children who lived in Nairn and who were accessing GME.

(Ian Jackson) – Before there was provision of GME at Nairn.

Comment from the Floor – But there is no proper GME provision!

(Fiona Shearer) – Once provision was established at Nairn, the arrangement was that transport from Nairn to IRA would only be provided for those children who had older siblings at IRA.

Q8 - We are clear that GME has not been established at Nairn. It doesn't meet the requirements to be classed as GME. It seems like you are holding this consultation after the decision has been taken. We have a situation where in the past children were given transport through to IRA, and that has been changed with no parental communication. You are saying this is based on the idea that there is GME at Nairn Academy, but we consider it Gaelic language provision, not GME.

Q9 - Parents knew nothing about this change. When was it introduced?

Comment from the Floor – I have a child who is in S3 who gets transport, and so do others in that year. I have younger children who also receive transport. Nothing was ever communicated to me to say the younger ones only get transport because they have older siblings. No change was ever discussed. We have never been told that the transport entitlement had changed. There is a lack of communication. I have another child currently in GM P7. Do I just keep my head down and assume they will get transport?

A9 (Ian Jackson) – Where we implement a transport change, we normally apply a principle that any younger siblings of children who received transport prior to the change will also get transport. We don't expect siblings to attend different schools.

Q10 - I was involved in the meetings when we were trying to get GME in Nairn, 5-6 years ago, and this question came up then, because we were aware that the provision in Nairn was not going to be the same, but there were very many children who did not want to go to Inverness for GME. We were told at the time that the provision of transport to Inverness would continue until Nairn Academy offered the same level of GME as IRA. We were reassured of that at the time. These meetings were minuted. Parents and their children choose their preferred education for their own reasons. We are very happy with Nairn Academy, but you can't say it's the same as IRA.

A10 (Ian Jackson) – We do have the situation of course, that until we build up the numbers at Nairn, we can't build up the range of GM subjects.

Q11 – I didn't get an answer to my question earlier, that if we had say, 8 kids coming in every year, what staffing provision would that get us?

A11 (Ian Jackson) – There is a formula for staffing in secondary schools, where the number of teachers is linked to the number of pupils. It's a very complicated formula. It's available on the website and we can send you a link to that.

(Fiona Shearer) – Our staffing formula impacts on different schools differently. It does depend on the size of the school. IRA is probably twice the size of Nairn Academy. The other issue we have in all of this is recruitment in GME, which is not straightforward, for primary or secondary. We do try hard to recruit and retain, but if someone leaves it can be difficult to recruit a replacement.

Q12 – The previous teacher at Nairn was lovely and was a qualified Geography teacher which was great, but when she left, we were left hoping the Council would recruit another Gaelic-speaking geography teacher, or our children had to change their subject choices. The key point is sustainability. I think that's one of our main concerns. We would love to see more numbers at Nairn, but our concern is that even if Millbank is at capacity, it may not lead to a sustainable situation at Nairn. Would it qualify for even one full time teacher? Does the Council have Nairn Academy's

back? Are there any prospects of staff being shared, so that teachers from IRA could offer subjects at Nairn?

A12 (Fiona Shearer) – We are looking at using technology for this. If you take someone out of IRA it impacts on the timetable there, but we will look at options for delivering lessons remotely. Absolutely we support Julie and the team at Nairn, but it can be very difficult to get supply cover at the best of times, doubly so when you need a Gaelic speaker.

(Julie MacDonald) – It's difficult to cover for subject specialists. Music is another particular example. This is a bit of a chicken and egg scenario. We did have lessons originally through e-sgoil, pre-COVID, but the relationship with the teachers was something we missed. It could cover a gap, but I don't think we would like to see it long-term. Until we grow the pupil numbers we won't be able to offer more. When I hear and see what is going on with Gaelic at IRA, we are nowhere near that.

Q13 - On that point, can I ask about the catchment areas? There are four feeder schools proposed for Nairn in a 5-mile something radius. It's a very small catchment, so how do we grow the numbers? For the next seven years, we are not going to have enough GM children to get close to IRA. We just don't have the numbers in such a small catchment.

(Follow-up from the floor) – My grandchildren are in Croileagan, but that facility can only take 16 children. Parents who are accepted are those who show most willingness for their children to go into GME. It's not going to grow if there is a limit of 16 on Gaelic pre-school.

(Follow-up from the floor) – The conversion rate from Croileagan is poor.

(Follow-up from the floor) – If there were more children there, that would help.

Q14 - I have a child in P1 in GME and another in P3. The P1 was one of a group of ten, but the P3 only has one other child in his year group. That child has a sibling in IRA, so potentially my child could be the only one in his year group to enter Nairn Academy as a GM pupil. That's a huge concern for me, socially and educationally. The wider concern is that we are a small catchment, with that divide between going to IRA and Nairn. Without the same provision in Nairn, there will always be that dilution. I wasn't aware of all these implications when I enrolled my child in Gaelic Medium within the school, or for example that the choice of Gaelic would potentially be at the expense of another language. It's a big decision for parents. If I chose IRA, along with the only other child in the year group, what would that mean for the future of GME at Nairn?

A14 (Ian Jackson) – Going back to the point about how we define the catchment, that's what this consultation is about really. If people have views, express them tonight or send them in. I would say that, on the eastern side, because it's a Council boundary with Moray, there is no possibility of changing. However, if people think

that, say, Ardersier and Croy should be included in Nairn rather than Inverness, that's an opinion we would have to consider.

Q15 – The Council doesn't provide transport for people from Ardersier or Croy to come here, so they don't really have that option.

A15 (Ian Jackson) – Unless the catchment was changed.

Q16 - It's a shorter journey from Ardersier to Nairn, compared with Inverness.

Follow-up from the floor - If you look at your justification for places like Avoch, you have used distance as the criterion for deciding between BSGI and Dingwall. The likes of Ardersier should be treated the same.

A16 (Ian Jackson) – The Fortrose situation is a little different in that there is no GME within the Fortrose ASG, so we are dividing that area up between Inverness and Dingwall, but the whole point of this exercise is to take views.

Q17 - The EM secondary school for Ardersier isn't IRA, so it's exactly the same situation. You made the decision for Fortrose on a school-by-school basis, but didn't make the same judgment for the Culloden ASG.

A17 (Ian Jackson) – Your point is well-made. We have to set out a proposal for people to comment upon. The assumption on the proposal is that people in Croy and Ardersier tend to gravitate towards Inverness rather than Nairn, but we will consider all the points made tonight.

(Fiona Shearer) – Historically, with EM, that has been the case. A few years ago we had to clarify the point, because a rumour surfaced that the Council was going to include Ardersier in the Nairn catchment area, and people locally did not want that. It could be a possibility though, that the GM and EM catchments could differ.

Q18 – If we could include Croy, Ardersier and maybe even Culloden in the Nairn GM catchment, we would have a much better opportunity to grow the pupil numbers.

Follow-up from the floor – Also IRA is at capacity.

Q19 - Would there be any chance to get a third GM class at Millbank, if the numbers increased?

A19 (Fiona Shearer) – Yes, that would be the normal thing, if the number grew sufficiently. We have annual staffing discussions, where we look at school rolls. Not to put a dampener on things, we are facing, nationally, a falling school roll.

Just to go back to the point made earlier about the Croileagan, that is a Partner Centre nursery, run by the Care and Earing Alliance and not by the Council. The limit on the number of children will be around their building capacity and staffing, but I've made a note about ELC provision. We are restricted at Millbank as well, for ELC. If

there are people who would like GME but can't get into Croileagan, that's maybe something we need to look at.

Q20 – I run the Gaelic baby and toddler group in Nairn and have children in Croileagan. When we talk about growth, I feel I cannot promote GME past primary school anymore. We were able to promote 0-18 before, because we had IRA. I am really disappointed that my children will have to go to Nairn Academy. We are never going to have the numbers, we are too small. In my opinion, the Council is putting GME to death in Nairn. Not every parent who enrolls in GME at Millbank wants GME at secondary level, but there are some that do, and you are taking the opportunity away. I am really disappointed.

(Fiona Shearer) – What are the numbers like at the baby and toddler end?

Follow-up – The overall numbers are good, but not everyone wants Gaelic. When I try to speak to parents about what's going on, we can't talk past primary school, we can't encourage them about the Academy. What's the point of putting your children into GME for primary school if there is nothing for them in secondary?

Follow-up from the Floor - A lot of parents are directly asking that question. People don't know what's going to be available in the Academy. You are adding in more hurdles to GME all the time.

(Ian Jackson) – But before we had the provision in Nairn Academy there was a big drop-out rate in GME, because pupils from Nairn didn't want to travel to Inverness to continue to access GME. We were getting the opposite point of view put to us then.

Follow-up from the Floor – I think you need to make it clear what the options are and stick with them. Since my child started – he's now in P7 – the changes in the provision have been unbelievable, and what is on offer is nothing like what I was promised. The GM classes at Millbank are too small, there are only a few children in each year group. There's been a massive turnover of teachers at the school, and then at secondary we aren't being provided with anything suitable.

(Ian Jackson) – Do you feel we would be better off having no GME provision in Nairn?

Follow-up from the Floor – You need to build the provision. At Dingwall, there was a big push to get lots of the kids doing Gaelic for learners. I don't see that at Nairn. Are children being taught Gaelic in S1? If you have only, say, 4 kids being taught Gaelic, and yet you have a teacher, that isn't an effective use of resources. Many parents see it as a waste of money. Promoting Gaelic is always down to the parents, and we get very little from Highland Council. If a teacher leaves, send somebody down from Inverness. Yes, it would disrupt their timetable, but it's supposed to be a council for all of Highland.

(Fiona Shearer) – It's not quite as simple as that, I have to say. If someone has a teaching commitment, they are not necessarily going to be available to come to Nairn.

Follow-up from the Floor – It's been done in Moray. If other Councils can do it, why can't Highland Council? You can do, it just takes effort. When the previous teacher left, you didn't seem to do much about it.

(Fiona Shearer) – We did try to recruit, but as has been said, recruitment can be challenging, especially for GME.

(Julie MacDonald) – The delay over the summer was because we were waiting on a potential transfer. We initially didn't go to advert for that reason.

Q21 – I am one of those parents who moved to Nairn to access GME. I don't particularly have roots in Nairn. I've listened to the discussion with interest and I don't think we will solve the issues tonight. Widening the Nairn catchment to include Croy, Tornagrain and Ardersier might be one way of boosting numbers in Nairn and over time, maybe 10 years, that could have a positive impact. However everyone in this room is thinking of the next few years and the only solution I can see is that we keep IRA as an option for secondary school pupils. Otherwise there is too much of a disparity. The service needs to be equal for all.

A21 (Fiona Shearer) – Thank you for that point.

Q22 – If this is about setting catchments for GME, and Nairn Academy is not providing GME, why is this proposal being made? It is the IRA where the GM facility is.

A22 (Lena Walker) – When the catchment consultation began, there was a broader offer of GME available at Nairn. Geography was offered previously. The change of staffing in the last few weeks has created a situation where we need to look at the proportionality of the provision, along with the school.

Q23 – I don't think Nairn Academy has ever had that much compared to IRA. None of the timetables ever looked that strong for GME.

Follow-up from the Floor – I don't think any of the parents who chose Nairn Academy ever thought the provision would be the same as IRA. Parents were just grateful for having provision locally, after their children had put so much into primary school. It never seems to be easy for parents. I would like to say though, that this is about catchment areas, and any child who wants a place at IRA can request one. I have never heard of anyone being refused. The issue seems to be the transport. Now that you are putting in these catchments, it's giving you a reason to take away the transport.

A23 (Fiona Shearer) – We are creating these catchments because we have been asked to by the Scottish Government.

(Ian Jackson) – Yes, the catchments are being created because of statutory guidance issued by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, who act as the agents of the Scottish Government in matters relating to the Gaelic language. There is therefore a legal pressure on us to define these catchment areas, but we clearly have to consider the points that have been made tonight. I do remember that there was a drop-off in GME in the Nairn area before we had provision at Nairn Academy, and Highland Council has acted with the best of intentions in setting up provision locally. It's maybe not exactly what parents wanted but that's where the intention came from.

Q24 – I would just like to say that we had a really positive meeting with Julie and Sarah before the summer when the school were in the process of hiring, and I really appreciate the very positive attitude towards Gaelic in the Academy, trying to make Gaelic visible, staff members learning and using the language, and looking forward to how the new building has a place for Gaelic. Where it falls down is in the funding and support from the Council, so when we are making a formal catchment decision, unless the Council is willing to look at more creative solutions for Nairn, I think we would struggle to get on board with the idea that everyone from Nairn should go to Nairn Academy for GME. The issue is how we get to the critical mass within the school, that means the investment is actually producing meaningful GME.

Q25 - How did the Council think that employing a single teacher would result in the same provision as they have from an entire department at IRA? It's not fair on parents and pupils. Why can't our young people have both? It's a very small number that travel from Nairn to IRA. It's not as if you will need to provide a bus for 30 kids. I don't understand why it has to be one or the other.

Follow-up from the Floor – There's already spaces on the transport that's going.

A25 (Fiona Shearer) – There aren't spaces every day. Only for two days a week.

(Ian Jackson) - We can look at that with our transport colleagues.

Q26 - In the new build for Nairn Academy, I assume there have been projections done for school roll? How many classrooms will be dedicated to GME? Will there be capacity for GME to expand?

A26 (Julie MacDonald) – There are no dedicated GM classrooms, but two are planned for modern languages. In the new build, there will be a lot of shared classrooms.

(Fiona Shearer) - The plans for the new build involved a much more creative use of space than is traditional.

(Julie MacDonald) – The crucial point is resource. We have started learner classes. Nothing we do at present can compare with IRA, but the aim is to achieve equity of provision, so that young people in Nairn will be able to access GME in their own catchment school, without having to travel to Inverness.

Q27 – Some of these discussions are unsettling for parents who have young children. The impact should not be under-estimated.

There being no further questions, the Chairperson thanked everyone for coming, and reminded everyone that representations should be sent to Ian Jackson, email Education.Consultations@highland.gov.uk (address circulated in the letter), or via the online form, to arrive **no later than Friday 27 October 2023**. He also advised that the record of the meeting will be made available at least 3 weeks before the meeting of the Education Committee where it is intended that the report of the meeting, plus any submissions/representations and the view of Education Scotland on the proposal, will be considered.