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Public consultation Gaelic Medium Catchment Areas Proposal

It is understood that the Highland Council (*the Council*) is seeking the views of local communities on a proposal to establish Gaelic Medium catchment areas for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis, Dingwall Primary School, Millbank Primary School, Inverness Royal Academy, Dingwall Academy, and Nairn Academy. In doing so have prepared an 'Educational Benefits Statement' and a number of 'Catchment Maps' for the three proposed catchments.

As parents of two children within the Nairn Millbank Primary School GM unit and one child within the Inverness Royal Academy GM unit, our comments are as follows:

Educational Benefits Statement – Introduction:

This paper states in the introduction section that the consultation seeks '...To formalise the current arrangements relating to Gàidhlig Medium Education (GME) in Nairn Academy, under which the catchment area for Nairn Academy will apply to both Gàidhlig Medium and English Medium education...'.

This statement implies that there is an existing agreed arrangement and that currently Nairn Academy offers a GME Education. However, both of these statements are far from accurate. Nairn Academy has never operated as a formal GME setting and as shown below is not operating currently as one, nor will it have the pupil demand in the future to operate as one.

Moreover, the removal of the longstanding transport for secondary GME pupils from Nairn to the IRA back in 2022, was never subject to any formal consultation and or public discussion, instead it was removed without warning and justification to the secondary intake for academic year 2022. Therefore the assertion that this consultation is to ratify a previously agreed position is wholly inaccurate.

Nairn Academy Current Gaelic Medium Education Provision

The consultation implies that Nairn Academy is operating a GME currently. This assertion is fundamentally incorrect, as recognised and confirmed by the Council panel at the public meeting on 5th September 2023, Nairn Academy only has 2no. students with S1 and 3no. Students in S2 wishing to participate in GM.

Additionally, these students are only being taught a very limited timetable which precludes teaching any subjects within the medium of GM and the students within S1 who have elected to take the GM language course are doing so at the expense of a foreign language, which we understand might not comply with educational requirements

Whereas it is understood that GME students within Dingwall Academy are taught History, Geography and Modern Studies all within the medium of GM and GME students at the IRA are taught History, Geography, Modern Studies, RMPS and PSE within the medium of GM. Therefore, until Nairn Academy can offer an equivalent and compliant GME experience it is unrealistic to expect parents with Nairn to accept a substandard GME when compared to neighbouring schools.

Nairn Academy Future Ability to Offer Gaelic Medium Education

Whilst it is admirable that the Council wishes to develop a GME unit at secondary level within Nairn, and one which we would fully support. The current consultation demonstrates that when the Nairn Academy proposed catchment is compared to both the IRA and Dingwall Academy proposed catchments, Nairn Academy one is insufficient to provide sufficient students to warrant a GME unit.

This is based on Nairn Academy GME proposed catchment being served by just 4no. primary schools, whilst the proposed IRA catchment is served by 33no. primary schools and the proposed Dingwall Catchment is served by 19no primary schools.

Furthermore, Millbank Primary School in Nairn has been operating a GME unit for several years and currently operates two GME classes across the whole school – GM 1-3 & GM 4-7 with a roll of 28 pupils. Over the years of operating the GME unit in Millbank, the GME school role has been fairly static and is unlikely to increasing significantly due to the size of the primary school catchment and the current role of the GM nursery within the town. As such, it can be forecasted that the number of pupils undertaking GME at Nairn Academy will not increase significant and instead will be a relatively low number of pupils and one which would be unsustainable to support a GME within Nairn Academy.

Whereas Dingwall Academy is feed from a GME unit with a role of 75 pupils and IRA is feed from a GME unit of 214 pupils. Both of which are significantly higher than the Nairn Academy Catchment and therefore have the ability to sustain the existing GME units associated with the secondary GME within these locations.

Comparative Catchment Areas

Given the above has demonstrated that Nairn Academy is currently not offering a GME education and has insufficient demand in the future to deliver one. It is realistic to assume parents of the current pupils enrolled within the Millbank primary GME unit to want a 'like for like' education as being offered in neighbouring catchments and one that satisfies the legislative requirements for GME.

Therefore, it is argued that the most suitable option would be to reinstate the transport of Nairn Academy GME pupils to the IRA for secondary GME as the most appropriate and would not be adversely prohibited due to distance between Millbank PS and the IRA; as this distance is approximately an 18mile journey, which is similar to a number of travel distances proposed for the other catchments (namely, Cromarty Primary to Dingwall Academy at 19.2miles, Beaully Primary to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis at 17.6 miles, Teanassie Primary to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis at 17.2 miles, Foyers Primary to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis at 18.2 miles, Stratherrick Primary to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis at 18.1 miles, Cromarty Primary to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis at 25.9 miles and Resolis Primary to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis at 20.9 miles).

Doing so, would offer the parents of the Nairn primary GME unit the option of either seeking a full, proper and comparative secondary GME at the IRA if they so wish, or retaining their children within Nairn to attend Nairn Academy where they can accept a lesser GM education.

I look forward to receiving confirmation of receipt of our response and we are happy to discuss any of the matters outlined above.

Yours sincerely,

Mr & Mrs Hilton.

