

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to establish Gàidhlig Medium catchment areas for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis; Bun-sgoil Inbhir Pheofharain - Dingwall Primary School; Bun-sgoil Bruach na Muilne - Millbank Primary School, Nairn; Acadamaidh Rìoghail Inbhir Nis - Inverness Royal Academy, Acadamaidh Inbhir Pheofharain - Dingwall Academy and Acadamaidh Inbhir Narainn - Nairn Academy.

November 2023

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His 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 Gàidhlig Medium catchment areas for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis; Bun-sgoil Inbhir Pheofharain - Dingwall Primary School; Bun-sgoil Bruach na Muilne - Millbank Primary School, Nairn; Acadamaidh Rìoghail Inbhir Nis - Inverness Royal Academy, Acadamaidh Inbhir Pheofharain - Dingwall Academy and Acadamaidh Inbhir Narainn - Nairn Academy. Section two of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section three of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section four 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:

- attendance at the public meetings on 5, 13 and 19 September 2023 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
- visits to the site of Bun-sgoil Bruach na Muilne - Millbank Primary School, Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig, Inbhir Nis; Bun-sgoil Inbhir Pheofharain - Dingwall Primary School; Acadamaidh Inbhir Narainn - Nairn Academy; Acadamaidh Inbhir Pheofharain - Dingwall Academy and Acadamaidh Rìoghail Inbhir Nis - Inverness Royal Academy. This entailed 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](#).

2.2 The council organised a public consultation from 21 August to 27 October 2023. Copies of the proposal document were available widely, including at all 64 schools named in the proposal. The proposal document was available in ten libraries and published on the council's website.

Stakeholders were invited to respond to the consultation by completing a form or using electronic mail. Ten stakeholders responded to the consultation, of whom almost all were parents. The council held three public meetings. These were at Bun-sgoil Bruach na Muilne - Millbank Primary School on 5 September 2023; Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis on 13 September 2023, and at Bun-sgoil Inbhir Pheofharain - Dingwall Primary School on 19 September 2023. Twelve members of the public attended the meeting in Bun-sgoil Bruach na Muilne - Millbank Primary School. Three members of the public attended the meeting in Bun-sgoil Inbhir Pheofharain - Dingwall Primary School. No members of the public attended the meeting in Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis. Children and young people have not been consulted by the council directly. HM Inspectors consulted children and young people in our engagements.

2.3 Stakeholders who responded to the consultation raised a range of concerns and suggested how improvements can be made to the proposals. These related to the 3-18 curriculum, transport and travel, capacity in some schools to enable expansion of Gàidhlig Medium Education and how some districts have been assigned to catchment areas. Comann nam Pàrant and Bòrd na Gàidhlig responded to the consultation. The latter did so as a statutory consultee. Both organisations agree with the proposal, subject to a few amendments. Bòrd na Gàidhlig felt that urgent action should be taken on developing more equity in the secondary curriculum at Acadamaidh Inbhir Narainn-Nairn Academy. They offered to advise in taking this forward. Bòrd na Gàidhlig suggested that the council have clear guidelines on placing requests to support parents who wished their child to be educated out with their catchment area. Comann nam Pàrant agreed with many aspects of the proposal. They felt that parents were more likely to choose Gàidhlig Medium provisions in Inverness, particularly as parents travelled into the city for employment. They also cited the benefits of all Gàidhlig schools. Both organisations raised issues on travel and transport. Comann nam Pàrant highlighted that travel options had to be attractive to parents and not a barrier to accessing Gàidhlig Medium Education.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The Highland Council sets the context for their educational benefit statement as meeting outcomes towards Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017 and their Gaelic Language Plan. The council detail their commitment to continue increasing the speakers of Gàidhlig, who also accrue all the benefits of bilingualism. They refer to achieving outcomes towards best value for their service. The council feel that drawing up catchment areas clarifies for parents how they access Gàidhlig Medium Education. HM Inspectors agree that there are benefits to most of what the council is proposing. However, the council still need to take important actions to improve further the potential educational benefits resulting from their proposal.

3.2 A significant stakeholder concern is how well the proposals, if accepted, will result in children and young people having a quality, consistent and equitable 3-18 curriculum. Stakeholders recognise the importance of a well-planned curriculum in achieving high levels of fluency in Gàidhlig. Details of this are in paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4.

3.3 For the catchment area covered by the Dingwall area, stakeholders raised concerns that sgoil-àraich (early learning and childcare) is not currently available. In Inverness and Nairn catchment areas, stakeholders highlighted that capacity for enrolments are being reached at sgoil-àraich. The council should clarify in their final report how parents can access sgoil-àraich.

3.4 Stakeholders in Nairn raised concerns that not enough of the curriculum was available through immersion in Gàidhlig at the secondary stages. For a few young people within the proposed catchment for Nairn, educational benefits would reduce by not being able to attend Acadamaidh Rìoghail Inbhir Nis – Inverness Royal Academy. Specifically, young people access a more bespoke curriculum offer through Gàidhlig by attending secondary education in Inverness. At

the same time, stakeholders recognised the importance of Gàidhlig Medium Education being available in local areas. HM Inspectors agree that children and young people should access a 3-18 curriculum, in which immersion education is available in line with the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017. While Acadamaidh Inbhir Narainn - Nairn Academy build their curriculum offer, some parents are content to continue using the local secondary school. For those who are not, they should have an option of sending their child to Acadamaidh Rìoghail Inbhir Nis - Inverness Royal Academy, with dedicated, free transport provided. The council needs to plan further with staff in Nairn to develop a strategy to resource a curriculum that provides continuity and progression for the young people in Gàidhlig Medium Education. This should ensure that staffing allocations are sufficient to plan the curriculum for individuals and small groups of young people who are learning through Gàidhlig at the primary stages. Nairn Academy's new school building needs to support creating an immersive environment. Staff should be supported in their ambition to teach Gaelic (Learners) to young people.

3.5 The council invited stakeholders to suggest how schools are allocated to catchment areas. A few stakeholders suggested some changes that the council should consider. For some smaller villages, such as Ardersier and Croy, some stakeholders suggested that children and young people attend Gàidhlig Medium Education in Nairn rather than as assigned to Inverness. They felt that this was more attractive for parents and would increase enrolments in Nairn. A few stakeholders suggested that children and young people residing in Beaully should be included in the catchment area for Dingwall rather than Inverness. The current catchment area for English Medium at Fortrose Academy is being allocated between the provisions for Gàidhlig Medium at Dingwall and Inverness. Almost all stakeholders agreed with how these named districts would be allocated, as long as effective and equitable transport and travel arrangements were being provided consistently.

3.6 The council should provide further clarity and support on travel and transport. Particularly, Ardersier and Croy to Nairn; Alness, Beaully, Cromarty, Culbokie, Munlochy and Tore to Dingwall, and from Avoch and North Kessock to Inverness. Based on demand, taxis and minibuses are currently used. The council's proposal paper details travel arrangements based on existing catchment areas for secondary English Medium schools. In Inverness for example, young people's use of existing travel arrangements would result in them having to make further travel connections to Acadamaidh Rìoghail Inbhir Nis - Inverness Royal Academy, should the proposal proceed. This adds to the length and cost of young people's school day. In the proposal paper, travel arrangements are calculated based on distance from primary to secondary schools. This does not take account of remote areas, and children and young people's lived experiences of travelling for an education in Gàidhlig Medium. The council should articulate travel arrangements specific to catchment areas for Gàidhlig and avoid costs to parents. The council needs to ensure that transport, travel and cost is not a barrier to parents choosing Gàidhlig Medium Education. Children and young people, in accessing Gàidhlig Medium Education, need to experience excellence, equity, equality and fairness. The council should ensure that relevant impact assessments are undertaken, including equality and rural assessments. They should detail safeguarding arrangements for young children travelling on transport, including that young children are dropped off at close proximity to their school. In its final report, the council should ensure that all mileages between schools are included. A few are omitted in the proposal paper. The council need to be clearer on how they will decide on 'practicable arrangements' in utilising existing transport. They should also clarify the situations and contexts that merit transport by taxi or minibus. This should include reassurances about existing travel arrangements for individuals and their siblings. There are far fewer schools that offer Gàidhlig Medium rather than English Medium. This in itself, necessitates more travel for children and young people. The council should review how it describes the cost of transport 'as additional' when sustaining the Gàidhlig language is a national priority, embedded in legislation, with fewer schools for Gàidhlig available.

3.7 Stakeholders also requested that schools ringfence sufficient placings for Gàidhlig Medium Education where there are increasing school rolls and restrictions generally on admissions. The council should consider that their policy for Gàidhlig includes making sufficient places available for Gàidhlig Medium Education, as well as that placing requests support Gàidhlig Medium Education.

4. Summary

The Highland Council are fulfilling statutory duties when setting up catchment areas for Gàidhlig Medium Education. Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors support the proposals, with a few adaptations and clarification. Stakeholders, and notably children and young people, spoke of their successes and pride in being fluent in Gàidhlig. HM Inspectors agree that catchment areas should be established, subject to the actions that we recommend in section three of this report. In taking forward the proposals, the council should continue working with stakeholders to ensure and resource high-quality 3-18 Gàidhlig Medium curricula and immersion environments in all of the designated Gàidhlig Medium establishments. They should ensure safe, effective, free and future-proofed travel and transport arrangements so there are no barriers, including costs, in accessing Gàidhlig Medium Education. In schools, where there are increasing school rolls, with further increases projected, the council should ensure that future planning keeps abreast with demand for Gàidhlig.

HM Inspectors
November 2023