



HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION AND LEARNING SERVICE

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH GAELIC MEDIUM CATCHMENT AREAS FOR CRAIGHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL AND TAIN ROYAL ACADEMY

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal to establish Gaelic Medium (GM) catchment area for Craighill Primary School (soon to become part of the new merged Tain Primary School) and Tain Royal Academy

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 11 February 2025.
- The report from Education Scotland.

This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

The report proposes an amendment to the original proposal, to include the Golspie ASG within the new Gaelic Medium catchment. Further details are set out at Section 4.0 and 11.0 below.

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1.0 Background

- 1.1 Highland Council's Education Committee at its meeting on 21 November 2024, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to establish a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Craighill Primary School, soon to be part of the new merged Tain Primary School, and for Tain Royal Academy.
- 1.2 The Proposal Paper suggested that the new catchment will overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of all the primary schools within the Associated School groups of Tain Royal Academy, Invergordon Academy and Dornoch Academy.
- 1.3 **Appendix A** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendix B** is the appendix to the original proposal.
- 1.4 Having reviewed the results of the consultation exercise, the original proposal has been amended to include the catchment area of Golspie High School within the new GM catchment.

2.0 Consultation process

- 2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Monday 20 January 2025 to Friday 7 March 2025. 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 the schools in the Tain, Dornoch and Invergordon ASGs above, including parents of pre-school pupils.
 - (ii) The Parent Councils of each of the above schools.
 - (iii) All staff of the schools listed above.
 - (iv) Members of Parliament and Members of the Scottish Parliament for the area affected by the proposal.
 - (v) Trade union representatives.
 - (vi) All Community Councils for the areas covered by the Proposal.
 - (vii) Bòrd na Gàidhlig.
 - (viii) Comann nam Pàrant.
 - (ix) Education Scotland.
- 2.3 The proposal document was advertised on the Highland Council website.
- 2.4 A public meeting was held at Craighill Primary School on 11 February 2025. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website and in the *Ross-shire Journal*. 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 9 written responses received during the consultation period (not including the responses from the children). Copies of these responses can also be found at **Appendices 3i-3x**. Two respondents exercised their rights under Data Protection legislation not to have their responses published online.
- 3.2 Two responses were submitted on behalf of organisations (Comann nam Pàrant, and Bòrd na Gàidhlig), and another from the Lairg Primary School Parent Council. The remaining six responses were from local parents, school staff, or local residents.

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. Where different responses raise similar issues, these have been “grouped” for the purposes of the response.

Issue 1

I think the catchment should be wider. It's not fair to stop people coming to Gaelic just because they live a wee while away.

The more people we include in the area the more people can learn Gaelic.
There should be more Gaelic in other schools.

It's not fair on people that live outwith the catchment.

It's not fair that the Highland Council gets to choose where pupils go.

I think that it isn't fair if some kids get the opportunity to learn in Gaelic but others outside the catchment won't.

I think Lairg, Golspie and Brora should be included.

It is not fair if other people in their families speak Gaelic but they won't be able to go to a Gaelic school.

Restricting pupils from Gaelic Medium education (GME) goes against articles 28 and 30 of the UNCRC Rights of the Child.

There should be no restrictions on parents looking to send their children to Gaelic Medium Education, East Sutherland a once stronghold of the Gaelic language is severely lacking in opportunities for GME.

I am writing to express my concern about the proposed Tain GME catchment area and how this will affect children from Sutherland.

Whilst I'm not necessarily against a catchment area, how can it work when the children from areas of Sutherland previously able to attend now won't be able to if this goes ahead, but they also won't be able to access GME in another catchment area as there isn't one! In reality there will be no option for them at all, and I do know of families from these excluded areas who had hoped to put their child(ren) to GME in Tain.

There is currently no Gaelic Medium Education in Sutherland at all and only Gaelic for Learners S1-S4 in one of the 4 secondary schools, so young people here are severely disadvantaged. This proposed catchment area will now exclude even more of Sutherland that previously could actually access Gaelic.

These might not seem like huge numbers but every child is important. It doesn't feel like anytime since my own children were in GME, but recently they have all been passing on Gaelic to our communities through Gaelic song workshops, Gaelic wreath making and as musicians in a Sutherland Seachdain na Gàidhlig concert. If children here can't access the language then how can it be passed on?

I would be in favour of adding Golspie to the catchment area, until such time as Golspie may have its own GME provision (analogous to Bonar Bridge), so as not to hinder the development of Gaelic in the area, and to enable the creation of new Gaelic speakers to fill jobs (including teaching) and serve the growing Gaelic community further down the line in many ways, volunteering, care, culture, community work etc. The awareness of investment by HC in such provision will undoubtedly be seen as encouraging to Gaelic in general, providing a signal, and also foster among parents and children a sense of loyalty to both the language and to the HC area in terms of giving back, formally or informally.

GME should be accessible to all and the catchment should not cause obstacles for those who are within a reasonable position to travel.

The main thrust of this proposal is to do something about the "lack of clarity for parents in respect of entitlement to GME" and, to a lesser extent, saving money on transport costs.

Any lack of clarity must in some part (maybe a large part) be to do with the paucity of GME provision in the areas covered by this proposal and the areas on its borders.

I would argue that this militates against having too tightly drawn a catchment area - doing so directly impedes Highland Council's other, more important in my opinion, duty, "to promote and support Gaelic education".

The fact is that for children in the bordering parishes and areas outwith the catchment area - parts of Creich & Kincardine, Lairg and Rogart – there is no other access to GME primary education, or even Gaelic as a second or third option, and precious little secondary school opportunity to learn Gaelic (only at Dornoch to some extent). So in cutting off access to Craighill and Tain Royal Academy, HC is actually removing access to and support for the language, and all the benefits of bilingualism, in one of its most critically endangered areas.

I have nothing against the principle of catchment areas in general and I understand the reasoning behind Bòrd na Gàidhlig's guidance on the issue, but in this case there needs to be a different interpretation to the one proposed in this consultation. Highland Council should continue to allow children from the bordering districts in Sutherland to access GME in Tain, in the absence of absolutely any other alternative for them.

Which brings me to transport. It seems mean in the extreme to allow younger siblings of children already enrolled at Craighill, but who are outwith the proposed catchment area, to also enrol and use the school transport – but then to deprive them of transport once their older sibling(s) leave the primary school. Based on the pupil numbers quoted in the consultation document, the cost to HC would be negligible in the grand scheme of things. Indeed the prospect of this happening might make parents decide not to enrol the younger children in GME. Craighill's roll might actually fall from what it could currently be forecast to be. So this is yet another way in which the proposal could have the opposite effect to the stated intention of increasing the percentage of HC pupils in GME.

I find it very hard to believe that Bòrd na Gàidhlig would prefer Highland Council to stick to the strict letter of their guidance re catchment areas, rather than being flexible enough to allow families who really want GME for their children to have access to it, thereby supporting the language and benefiting the children.

The Scottish government has just announced £5.7 million of funding to support Gaelic. I sincerely hope Highland Council will be able to use some of this funding to improve access to GME in this area.

We are writing to provide feedback to address the proposed Gaelic Medium Catchment for Craighill Primary and Tain Royal Academy. We are

disappointed to hear that this proposal excludes Lairg Primary School. While Lairg may be considered rural on a national level, each child in Scotland deserves the same access to educational opportunities, including Gaelic language education.

By excluding Lairg and Golspie schools, the Highland Council would be adding an additional barrier of a catchment area where there is no other alternative for Sutherland families, effectively blocking children from accessing Gaelic language education. This provides a hurdle to educational access that will rob Sutherland families from the choice to access Gaelic language education, which is vital to engaging with the area's historical language and culture. In addition, it has been made aware to us that several families in Lairg remained unaware of Gaelic education being a resource available to their children, due to lack of advertisement.

A proposed solution to this issue is to not have the catchment area or to expand it to include Lairg and Golspie schools and all other related feeder Primary Schools.

Please do not neglect the educational rights of the children of Sutherland within the Lairg, Golspie, and all other related feeder primary schools by refusing their access to Gaelic education.

Comann nam Pàrant (Nàiseanta) (CnP) welcomes the formalisation of school catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education (GME) for the Tain Campus. We also appreciate the complexities around these catchments due to the geography of the area and the current lack of Gaelic medium education in Sutherland.

We welcome the inclusion of the Bonar Bridge Primary School catchment in the new catchment for Tain, whilst the provision at Bonar Bridge remains mothballed.

We agree that the GM catchment for Tain should overlay the English Medium catchments of the schools in the Tain, Dornoch and Invergordon ASGs.

We support the request from parents and others in the community that the catchment be extended to include the Golspie High School English medium catchment, for the following reasons:

There are some pupils currently accessing GME from Invershin, which lies between Lairg and Tain, but within the Lairg catchment. This is an indication that families are of the opinion that the travelling distance from this area is reasonable and until alternative GME provision is established within the Lairg area other families in a similar position in the future should be supported to access GME in Tain.

The new catchment area should be responsive to the situation within Sutherland where there is currently no provision for GME. This would also support the council's stated aim, "The Council is sympathetic to the idea that Gàidhlig Medium Education should be accessible as many pupils Highland as possible, provided it is practical and reasonable to provide access."

One of the aims of the formalising the catchment is to increase the uptake of GME by providing reassurance to parents that their transport is secure in legislation. In this instance, the exclusion of areas that have previously been included has potential to result in declining numbers of pupils in GME.

We welcome the council's commitment to continue to promote the opportunity for parents to submit a request for GMPE in line with the Education Act (Scotland) 2016.

We will continue to support early years activities and promotion of GME within the Sutherland area with a view to seeing such a request from parents at some point in the near future.

In principle Bòrd na Gàidhlig supports the establishment of a clear catchment area for the GME provision in Craighill Primary School / Tain 3-18 Campus, both Secondary and Primary provision, as proposed by the Highland Council.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig note that parents have raised concerns that Golspie ASG has not been included in the catchment area when historically, families from this ASG have previously accessed GME at Craighill Primary School.

We note that the consultation document indicated families are currently accessing GME from Invershin, which is in the Lairg Primary School catchment area and part of Golspie ASG. The proposal that these families will continue to receive transport, until they complete GME, is welcome.

Highland Council should give due consideration on whether it is appropriate to remove transport to GME from any future families living within the Golspie ASG. While we appreciate that travel time from some areas within the Golspie ASG may be prohibitive, other areas are accessible with parents opting for GME currently and in the past.

We welcome the proposal that should the mothballed GME provision at Bonar Bridge re-open due to increased demand, that the GME catchment for Tain would require to be amended, and new GME catchment published for Bonar Bridge Primary School.

In reference to the recent proposal to establish Gaelic Medium catchment areas for Craighill Primary School and Tain Royal Academy suggested by Highland Council, we are incredibly concerned that Sutherland families will be at a huge cultural disadvantage, and consequently be excluded from future provision of Gaelic medium education due to the proposed change of catchment area.

In addition to this, as there no immediate GME alternative proposed for Sutherland families at present, this leaves future families at a huge loss and significantly adds to the current barriers and concerns around the decline of Gaelic in Sutherland and the community's relationship with its native tongue. Again, this has great ramifications for future parents wanting their children to access a Gaelic education and the potential benefits provided from such a bilingual education.

Gaelic has strong cultural roots in Sutherland, and parents have aspirations for our children, current and future, to access their native language and the benefits of bilingualism. Understandably, we are hugely concerned by current decline and lack of provision in Sutherland. If provision isn't made accessible to all, we are in danger of losing the language and a life-long skill set that a Gaelic Medium Education can provide.

Response 1

The number of comments received in connection with this issue far exceeded those on any other subject.

In drawing up its proposal, the Council sought to strike a balance between making access to GME as wide as possible and the additional transport costs to the taxpayer. We were also mindful of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, which suggests that GM catchment areas should be an area in which the education authority thinks it is reasonable for pupils wishing to receive GME provision to travel to school, and should have the potential to attract parents to choose GME provision for their children.

Having reviewed the responses submitted during consultation, the Council is minded to widen the proposed catchment to include the area served by Golspie High School.

Issue 2

There is virtually no advertising by Highland Council in Sutherland communities that GME could be a possibility in their schools. I really feel Sutherland has been forgotten about.

Response 2

The above issue is not directly connected to the establishment of a GM catchment for the area, but will be referred to the Council's Gaelic Team for further consideration.

Issue 3

Future transport arrangements for Gaelic education should be suitable for the safety of all ages. While there are parents at Lairg Primary School and Nursery who have expressed interest in enrolling their children into Gaelic education, many families would be unwilling to send their primary school aged children on buses filled with those who are old enough to attend high school.

Response 3

At the present time separate transport is provided to Tain for pupils who live outwith the town itself but who wish to access GME. There are no plans to change the current school transport arrangements. The comment in the Proposal Paper was made because it is impossible to provide commitments about what transport arrangements will be made in the distant future. In hindsight, the comment was unnecessary and caused needless alarm to parents. The transport arrangements for GM pupils will continue as they are for the foreseeable future.

- 4.2 The note of the public meeting is at Appendix 2. There was a lively discussion at the meeting, with comments focused on the same 3 areas of concern were set out in the written representations. Participants thought that the proposed GM catchment should be widened to include the Golspie ASG; that the Council should provide guarantees around separate transport provision for primary school children, and that not enough was being done to promote Gaelic generally. These issues are addressed at Responses 1-3 above.

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 5**. A Gaelic language copy is at **Appendix 5A**.
- 5.2 In their report, HM Inspectors agree that the Council's proposal is of educational benefit to children and parents who reside within the catchment areas for Craighill Primary School and Tain Royal Academy (soon to be the Tain 3-18 campus). There are also educational benefits for children within the Invergordon and Dornoch areas. The proposal gives clarity to parents on how to access Gàidhlig Medium Education and a catchment area should be established. HM Inspectors noted that almost all stakeholders who met with them support the proposal, should the catchment be extended to include a wider geographical area. They also expressed their pride in and success in developing fluency in Gàidhlig and are clear about the benefits of bilingualism. HM Inspectors agree with stakeholders that the catchment area should be extended to ensure Gàidhlig Medium Education is accessible to as many children as possible. In taking forward the proposal, the Council should continue working with stakeholders to ensure and resource high-quality 3-18 Gàidhlig Medium Education curriculum and immersion environments in the existing and new Gàidhlig Medium establishments. There are omissions in the proposal regarding transport arrangements for children and young people from Invergordon and Dornoch. It will be important that the Council provide transport arrangements that are safe, feasible, long-term and attractive to realise the educational benefits of the proposal.
- 5.3 The issues raised by Education Scotland are the same as those raised in the public consultation, addressed at Responses 1-3 above.

6.0 Effects on the Community

- 6.1 The Proposal will not have any impact on the wider community.

7.0 Effects on School Transport

- 7.1 Travel arrangements are already in place for journeys to the designated GM provision. The proposal will clarify entitlement to this travel, but no changes are planned to the current arrangements.

8.0 Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

- 8.1 The proposal is not expected to have any impact on staff and school management arrangements.

9.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies

- 9.1 The Report from Education Scotland commented that there was an omission in the report regarding transport arrangements for children and young people from Invergordon and Dornoch. The matter is addressed at Response 3 above.

10.0 Overall Review of Consultation Exercise

- 10.1 The overwhelming majority of the comments received related to a desire to see the proposed catchment area widened. The Council has responded to these comments by agreeing to widen the GM catchment.
- 10.2 The other main concern expressed was around the future provision of school transport. This report confirms that no changes are planned to the current arrangements.

11.0 Conclusion

- 11.1 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 5 above.
- 11.2 The Education Scotland Inspector met with parents, pupils and staff, 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.
- 11.3 On reviewing all of the submissions, the note of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; officials conclude that the Proposal to create the new GM catchment areas offers educational benefits and should be implemented, with the amendment that the Golspie High School catchment should included within the new GM catchment.

12.0 Recommendation

- 12.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council proceeds with the course of action set out at Paragraph 11.3 above.

Kate Lackie

Assistant Chief Executive, Education

7 May 2025

