

Statutory Gaelic Medium Primary Education (GMPE) Assessment Request - Lairg.

1.0 GMPE Background

The Highland Council received a request, by email, on the 16th of June 2026 under the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 to [assess the need for Gaelic Medium Primary Education \(GMPE\)](#) in the Lairg area. The request was submitted by a lead parent on behalf of five children residing within the proposed GMPE Assessment Area. The children range in age from approximately 1 year old to 4 years old at the time of assessment, with dates of birth between June 2022 and June 2025. See Section 7, Table 3.

Lairg Primary School forms part of the Golspie Associated School Group (ASG). Currently access to GME in Tain has been available to families from the Golspie ASG area.

Lairg Primary School currently has a roll of 55 pupils in 3 classes and an assessed capacity of 75. Early Learning and Childcare has 9 children currently registered, with 15 expected based on the 26/27 enrolment by the end of this academic year.

The school currently delivers Gaelic as an L3 pathway for P5-7 with children in the nursery also attending Gaelic book bug sessions

2.0 Current Gaelic Medium Provision for Lairg:

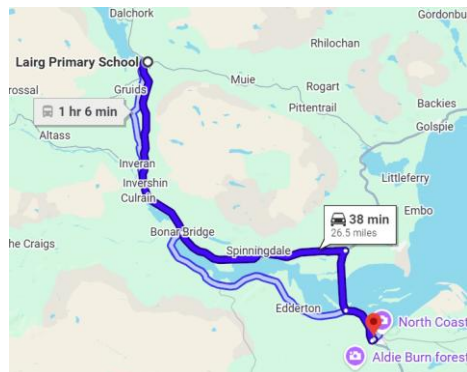
Highland Council's Education Committee, at its meeting on 21 November 2024, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to establish a Gaelic Medium catchment area for Craighill Primary School, now part of the new merged Tain Primary School, and for Tain Royal Academy. The original consultation proposal was that the Tain GME catchment should overlay the English Medium catchments within the Associated School Groups (ASGs) of Tain Royal Academy, Invergordon Academy and Dornoch Academy. During the consultation process, representations were made seeking the inclusion of the Golspie ASG within the proposed catchment area.

Following consultation, the Education Committee on the 4 June 2025 considered the findings and agreed to recommend an amended catchment area which included the Golspie ASG, recognising historic and current access to 3-18 GME in Tain by families from the wider area, including Lairg.

The establishment of the Tain Gaelic Medium catchment area provides a recent and relevant precedent for GME in the Lairg area. Following statutory consultation, Highland Council amended the original proposal to include the Golspie ASG within the catchment. This reflects the Council's willingness to consider established patterns of parental demand and access when determining Gaelic Medium catchment arrangements.

3.0 Purpose of the Lairg GMPE request:

This request has been submitted by a parent in response to identified parent interest in Gaelic Medium Primary Education within the Lairg area. Parents have indicated that, while Gaelic Medium provision is available through the established catchment arrangement in Tain, the daily travel distance is considered significant for young children of primary school age. They request provision in Lairg to better meet the needs of current and future families who wish their children to access Gaelic Medium Education.



4.0 GMPE Catchment Assessment Area for Lairg consideration

The GMPE Assessment Area for the purposes of this request has been defined using the statutory guidance and is reference to the demand recorded in the GMPE request as well as registered interest following the parental engagement session on the 10th September. The parents who have recorded a request for GME reside in the Golpsie and Lairg area.

The geographic area from which the GMPE request originates is Golspie ASG and this area may reflect future demand for Gaelic Medium Education from families. This includes Brora Primary, Golspie Primary, Helmsdale Primary, Lairg Primary, Rogart Primary, and Rosehall Primary. It should be noted that the Golspie ASG currently falls within the recognised 3-18 Gaelic Medium catchment area for Tain following the Council's 2025 consultation on GME catchment arrangements. The current GME catchment for parents is the Tain catchment. This catchment overlays the current English Medium (EM) catchments of all the primary schools within the Associated School groups of Tain Royal Academy, Invergordon Academy, Golspie High School and Dornoch Academy.

Should the outcome of this assessment support the establishment of local Gaelic Medium provision within Lairg primary school, a further statutory process would be required for catchment definition. Any such change could have implications for pupil numbers attending the existing Gaelic Medium provision in Tain and would therefore require careful consideration as part of any subsequent consultation and decision-making process.

There may also be implications for GME secondary provision, for transition arrangements and 3-18 pathways. Currently pupils in Golspie, Invergordan, Tain and Dornach ASG attend Tain Secondary for secondary GME education.

5.0 Assessment of Demand, School Estate and Transport Implications of GMPE Lairg

The demand profile presented in the request has been reviewed to confirm the number of children including their eligibility under the legislation, and their residence within the defined assessment area. See Table 1.

An analysis has also been undertaken of the ages of the children included within the request and their anticipated Primary 1 entry dates alongside stages of children who are currently in Tain GME. This information is important in considering the implementation of GME, including both immediate and future demand for GMPE and the considerations against the potential timeframe within which provision may be required. See Table 3 and 4.

Table 1 GME Pupil Cohort Profile (included in the Lairg GMPE request):

Date of Birth	Aug 2027	Aug 2028	Aug 2029	Aug 2030
09/11/2022	4	5	6	7
13/06/2022	5	6	7	8
10/01/2025	2	3	4	5
18/01/2024	3	4	5	6
23/06/2025	2	3	4	5

Table 2 – Start dates for P1

Date of Birth	Likely P1 Start	Current Age
13/06/2022	Aug 2027	4
09/11/2022	Aug 2027 or Aug 2028*	3
18/01/2024	Aug 2029	2
10/01/2025	Aug 2030	1
23/06/2025	Aug 2030	1

* Based on the typical Scottish school admission cut-off of children aged 5 between March of one year and February of the following year starting school the following August. A deferred entry request could alter this.

Table 3 School role* forecasting for GME pupils within the request:

DOB	Current Age/Stage	Academic Session 2027/28
09/11/2022	Tain Sgoil- araich / Lairg ELC	P1
13/06/2022	Lairg ELC	P1
23/06/2025	(0-3)	-

10/01/2024	(0-3)	-
18/01/2024	(0-3)	-
26/01/2019	P4 Tain GME	P5
23/02/2022	P1 Tain GME	P2
02/12/2020	P1 Lairg EM	P2
TOTAL		5

Table 4: Forecasting for pupils recorded on GMPE currently not enrolled in primary education:

Academic Session	C1	C2	C3	C4	Total Pupils
2027/28	1	-	-	-	1
2028/29	1	1	-	-	2
2029/30	1	1	1	-	3
2030/31	2	1	1	1	5

Based on Tables 3 and 4, the projected demand for GMPE is five pupils in 2027/28, rising to nine pupils by 2030/31. These projections are based on currently identified children only and do not include any additional demand that may arise following the establishment of local GMPE provision

The assessment also considered the suitability and capacity of the existing school accommodation, the availability of appropriately qualified teaching staff, and the implications for school transport arrangements. It also considered the long-term operational and educational sustainability

of the provision, alongside both revenue and capital cost implications. A full analysis of this is required and will be required for presentation to Elected Members following conclusion of the assessment. In addition, consideration was given to any potential impact on existing Gaelic Medium Education provision in Tain to ensure continued access to and support for GME.

A review of current accommodation at Lairg Primary School demonstrates that all available teaching and support spaces are fully utilised and play a role in delivering education provision, wellbeing support and partner services. There is no surplus accommodation within the school.

The school currently operates three composite classes (P1/2, P3/4 and P5/6/7). The former GP room has already been repurposed to accommodate the P5/6/7 class, maximising available space. In addition, the Learning Support Base is being renovated to provide a dedicated nurture room and resource hub to support pupils' emotional, social and wellbeing needs.

Remaining accommodation is used flexibly, with the library, music and resource room serving as a multi-purpose learning and resource space. The school also accommodates a range of partner services, including TYKES, CASWA, Children's Services Workers and visiting music instructors, all of whom require suitable space to deliver targeted support and enrichment activities.

Capital investment is therefore necessary to enhance and expand accommodation, ensuring the school estate remains fit for purpose and responsive to the evolving needs of pupils, staff and the wider community.

6.0 Resource Implications:

Teacher: £36,159 for a probationer up to £54,453. With oncosts at top of scale £76285

Estates: The establishment of local GMPE provision would have implications for the school estate. The Council currently has access to (£4M) Scottish Government GME Capital Funding, intended to support capital projects arising from increased demand for Gaelic Medium Education. Should estate modifications be required, the suitability of this funding source would be considered as part of the detailed implementation planning process.

Catchment Provision of GME in Lairg will require revision of GME catchment areas. The purpose of this assessment is to determine the need for GMPE provision in Lairg. Any proposal to create or modify GME catchment arrangements would require further detailed consideration, including the development of a full proposal, assessment of implications for existing provision in Tain, and consideration of any statutory consultation requirements. A family from out with Lairg primary school area has registered their interest for the purposes of this assessment for access to GME at Lairg Primary. Consideration will be given to implications of this for transport services and subsequent catchment consultations.

Transport: When the Gaelic Medium Education catchment area for Tain was extended to include the Golspie ASG, it was agreed that existing transport arrangements would continue to be utilised to support access to Gaelic Medium provision in Tain. As part of the current GMPE assessment for Lairg, consideration is being given to the implications of establishing local provision rather than transporting pupils to Tain. Any change to the current model would have resource implications for the Council's transport service.

As part of the current GMPE assessment for Lairg, consideration is being given to the implications of establishing local provision rather than transporting pupils to Tain. The implications for transport provision and associated resources are currently being assessed by the Council's Transport Service and will be incorporated into the final assessment once available. Any future changes to GME catchment arrangements would require separate consideration and assessment of the associated transport implications.

Based on the information currently available from the assessment, a decision to proceed with establishing GME provision is required by 1st October.

7.0 Recommendation

The assessment outcome is that Gaelic Medium Primary Education provision will be established in Lairg.

While the statutory GMPE assessment process operates on a presumption in favour of Gaelic Medium Education and requires education authorities to consider parental demand, officers must also have regard to the practicality, sustainability and affordability of establishing new provision, together with the availability of existing Gaelic Medium Education within the area.

The assessment recommends the establishment of GMPE provision. Although the indicative threshold for establishing GME is five children, the projected uptake of four children for August 2027/28 is considered proportionate within a rural setting. This reflects the demographic realities of small school communities while supporting access to Gaelic Medium education. Ongoing monitoring of enrolment trends will, however, be essential to ensure that demand is sustained and that pupil numbers grow to support the long-term viability of the provision. Additionally, as per good practice in the statutory guidance for GMPE, Highland Council continues to monitor the key information about demand through parental engagement and will keep a rolling account of the other information about demand and the other matters it must have regard to within full assessment time period.

Officers will therefore now undertake detailed consideration of the associated implications for the timeline of instigating provision, capital and revenue implications for school estates, transport arrangements, staffing, catchment implications and other resourcing requirements. This

programme of work will ensure that future provision is deliverable, sustainable, and capable of meeting the needs of children and families while maintaining the quality of education for children in GME across the school.

This assessment outcome reflects the Council's GLP commitment to supporting and promoting Gaelic education.

The recommendation will be taken to Education Committee for elected member agreement of the outcome of the GMPE Assessment for Lairg.