

Education (Scotland) Act 2016

Report by Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland (HMIE) to give an independent view of The Highland Council's determination to establish Gàidhlig - Gaelic Medium Education at Lairg Primary School. This is from August 2027, unless it would be unreasonable to do so. The Highland Council has designated the assessment area for which it will assess the need for Gàidhlig Medium Education as the catchment area associated with Golspie High School. This is also known as the Golspie High School associated school group (ASG).

Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd - The Highland Council

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1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared on behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland in accordance with the terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 (the 2016 Act). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial view of the determination to establish Gàidhlig Medium Education at Lairg Primary School, within The Highland Council, in August 2027. The council received this request from parents under section 7 of the 2016 Act. The request is, as required, from parents of children below school age whose children have not yet started to attend a primary school. The council has designated the Golspie High School ASG as the assessment area for which it will assess the need for Gàidhlig Medium Education.

1.2 Section two of this report sets out brief details of the assessment process and HMIE's evaluation of the determination for the council to establish Gàidhlig Medium Education. This is in accordance with sections 12 and 13 of the 2016 Act. HMIE draw on their national expertise and inspection evidence relating to Gàidhlig, and the wider Scottish educational context, to inform their evaluation of the potential need for Gàidhlig Medium Education.

1.3 This section sets out HMIE's evaluation of:

- the details received from the council on the parental request;
- other information received from the council, which it was required to consider during the initial assessment about the demand for Gàidhlig Medium Education; and
- mandatory factors that must be considered by the council in determining the potential need for Gàidhlig Medium Education. This is in accordance with paragraph 1.52 of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education 2017.

2. Assessment process and HMIE's determination on establishing Gàidhlig Medium Primary Education

2.1 The Highland Council notified HMIE on 11 September 2026 that it had received a parental request on 16 June 2026 for an assessment of the need to establish Gàidhlig Medium Education. This request is for Gàidhlig Medium Education to be established at Lairg Primary School in August 2027. The council advised HMIE that it had undertaken an initial assessment of this request. This evidenced that there is demand for Gàidhlig Medium Education. The council has agreed to establish Gàidhlig Medium Education at Lairg Primary School. HM Inspectors agree that there is sufficient demand to establish Gàidhlig Medium Education at Lairg Primary School in August 2027. This is based on the evidence that the council has provided to HMIE at the time of drafting this report. We therefore recommend that the council proceed to establish Gàidhlig Medium Education in August 2027.

2.2 The parental request seeks the establishment of Gàidhlig Medium Education at Lairg Primary School. The daily travel distance to the existing provision at Tain Primary School is considered excessive for young children. Parents believe that provision in Lairg would better meet the needs of current and future families who want their children to access Gàidhlig Medium Education. The council has set the assessment area for this potential new provision as the Golspie High School ASG. The breadth of this assessment area maximises opportunities for more parents to access Gàidhlig Medium Education. This should assist with sustaining the new provision, should the council establish Gàidhlig Medium Education.

2.3 HMIE recognise that the projected enrolment figures provide sufficient evidence of parental demand to establish Gàidhlig Medium Education in Lairg. These projections may increase after a decision to establish Gàidhlig Medium Education locally. Evidence from the development of Gàidhlig Medium Education nationally indicates that demand may increase when parents have confidence that accessible, high-quality and sustainable local provision will be available. Should the new provision be established, this would alter the catchment area for Gàidhlig Medium Education in Tain Primary School. The council recognises that consultation on the catchment area, together with detailed planning for the necessary transport arrangements, would be a future priority. The council has assessed that the proposed new provision would not have a negative impact on the Tain area.

2.4 The council's initial assessment indicates that there is no surplus teaching accommodation at Lairg Primary School. The council has started to investigate Gàidhlig-specific funding as a potential source of financial support. HMIE recognise that accommodation is an implementation issue that requires further detailed planning. This should take account of the distinctive requirements of immersion in Gàidhlig. Some of the existing school-based accommodation is used by partners. The council should consider how these arrangements could be used to develop or increase the use of Gàidhlig language and activities to support children's learning through Gàidhlig within and beyond the classroom. This is a mandatory factor that should be considered as set out in paragraph 1.52 of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017.

2.5 The council's initial assessment of the proposal to establish Gàidhlig Medium Education refers to the need to secure an appropriately qualified teacher of Gàidhlig Medium Education. The council rightly identifies that this will be critical to successful implementation. Given the rural location of the school, the council should promote this career opportunity early and consider how it can address any barriers to recruitment. Staffing arrangements should enable Gàidhlig to be the routine language of learning, teaching and communication within the new provision. Longer-term strategic and linguistic planning should consider the educational benefits of 3–18 provision that ensures continuity in high-quality immersion, the curriculum, children's progress in Gàidhlig and the continuing development of the provision. HMIE note that this is already an objective of the council's Gàidhlig Language Plan.

2.6 The council has been collaborating with parents on the request to establish a new Gàidhlig Medium provision. It should continue to engage with parents across Lairg and the wider assessment area. Parents should be involved meaningfully in planning the establishment and development of Gàidhlig Medium Education, if established. The council should fulfil its responsibility to promote Gàidhlig Medium Education and continue to collaborate with local and national Gàidhlig organisations to build awareness and encourage sustainable demand.

3. Summary

3.1 HMIE agree with The Highland Council's determination that Gàidhlig Medium Education should be established at Lairg Primary School.

3.2 HMIE have evaluated The Highland Council's assessment of the need to establish Gàidhlig Medium Education at Lairg Primary School. We have drawn on our national expertise and inspection findings to evaluate the parental request, projected pupil numbers, rural context, accessibility of existing provision and the wider educational context. The evidence demonstrates credible parental demand for Gàidhlig Medium Education. The projections are based only on children currently known to the council and do not include additional demand that may arise if accessible local provision is established.

3.3 There are important implementation matters still to resolve. These include accommodation, staffing, transport, catchment arrangements and costs. The Highland Council's assessment acknowledges these important implementation considerations. On the evidence provided, HMIE do not consider that these matters provide sufficient grounds to determine that establishing Gàidhlig Medium Education would be unreasonable.

Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba
His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland

An t-Sultain 2026 - September 2026

Às leth Àrd-Neach-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba
On behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland.