

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to establish a catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary School.

February 2020

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her 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 a catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary School. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 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:

- 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;
- individual discussions relating to the proposals;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- visits to the site of Gairloch Primary School, including discussion 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 formal consultation ran from 9 December 2019 to 31 January 2020. The proposal paper was distributed to staff, Parent Councils and parents of pupils attending the primary schools mentioned within the proposal paper. It was also sent to members of the United Kingdom and Scottish Parliaments, trade unions, Bòrd na Gàidhlig and community councils. A notice was placed in local press. Information was available on the council's website and on social media. In the final report, the council should indicate how they have consulted children and young people.

2.3 The council convened a public meeting at which officers of the Care and Learning Services enabled eight attendees to discuss the proposals. Attendees discussed learning of Gaelic as a

second language, Gaelic Medium Education, impact of proposals on rural areas, school transport and the availability of Gaelic Medium Education at Lochcarron Primary School (The Highland Council). Four written responses were received, which raised similar issues to those aired at the public meeting. Bòrd na Gàidhlig is a statutory consultee for changes to arrangements for Gaelic Medium Education. They welcomed that a catchment area was being set for Gaelic Medium Education but had some concerns.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 This proposal demonstrates The Highland Council's continued commitment to implementing the statutory Guidance for Gaelic Education, 2017. The council is proposing a catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary School. This will overlay the catchment areas of some or all of the other primary schools associated with Gairloch High School, depending on the results of the consultation. These primary schools offer learning through English only. They are: Bualnaluib, Kinlochewe, Poolewe, Shieldaig and Torridon Primary Schools. This proposal assists the council in clarifying transport arrangements for children attending Gaelic Medium Education. It also assists the council in pursuing its duty to provide best value.

3.2 Almost all consultees supported the council in establishing a catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education. There are a few issues and concerns arising from the consultation that merit further consideration. Almost all consultees emphasised the importance of parents having access to Gaelic Medium Education. They felt that parents should influence how far they wished their children to travel for this option, within the proposed catchment area. The statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education specifies that a catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education should be an area that the education authority thinks is reasonable for children to travel. The Guidance also specifies that a catchment area should have the potential to attract parents to choose Gaelic Medium Education. The council is clear that the proposed catchment area should overlay that for Gairloch Primary School, Poolewe Primary School and Bualnaluib Primary School. Travel distances from the catchment area of these schools all fall within the council's informal arrangement to provide transport within reasonable travelling distance. This has generally been interpreted as meaning up to 15 miles, but there are numerous variations. In such cases, the council states that all children requiring transport to attend Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary School would use existing transport arrangements for young people at Gairloch High School. Should the council proceed with the proposal, the final report should detail safety arrangements for young children travelling on buses.

3.3 Some of the schools affected by this consultation are in very remote rural areas. The schools have very small pupil rolls. In one of those rural areas, some consultees are concerned that the option of Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary School will adversely impact on the future of local schools. These consultees also cite that one solution would be for all children to learn Gaelic as an additional language as part of the curriculum. This, they think, would keep children attending their local schools. HM Inspectors agree with the council, that should parents who reside within the proposed catchment area request access to Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary School, that that should be made available. In its final report, should the proposal be adopted, the council needs to be clearer that Gaelic Learner and Medium Education are both valuable learning pathways. However, they should take account of evidence that immersion brings children to fluency more quickly.

3.4 A number of consultees expressed concern about some of the proposed distances that children were expected to travel to access Gaelic Medium Education. They felt that these may not be reasonable, particularly for young children. For this reason, the council welcomed views on whether the catchment areas of Kinlochewe, Shieldaig and Torridon Primary Schools should be included in the proposed catchment area. At the same time, the council is endeavouring to make

Gaelic Medium Education as widely available as possible. The council should keep demand for Gaelic Medium Education in the area under review, and engage with parents and others in ascertaining whether further Gaelic Medium Education provision could be put into place. This should be based on the terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. At the time of the consultation, Torridon Primary School is mothballed. The response from Comann nam Pàrant, and Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council highlight that children residing in the catchment area of Shieldaig Primary School are considerably closer to Lochcarron Primary School than Gairloch Primary School. Gaelic Medium Education is available at Lochcarron Primary School, but it does not fall within the associated school group of Gairloch High School. The distance between Shieldaig Primary School and Lochcarron Primary School falls within the council's reasonable distance to travel. It is reported that there are existing links between Lochcarron and Shieldaig Primary Schools. An important purpose of setting catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education is to attract parents to this option in Scottish education. At the public meeting, the council stated that they would consider further issues relating to this suggestion. The council should do some further work to ascertain the impact that this may have on educational benefits for children. Their further investigation should include a focus on the impact for children in accessing early learning and childcare and secondary education through the medium of Gaelic. The council's final report should be clear on the resulting educational benefits of their final decision. Once a decision has been made on this, the council may need to revisit section 6.11 of their proposal paper which highlights that the Gairloch High School catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education is the same area that currently exists. Bòrd na Gàidhlig in their response state that the travel distances suggested from Shieldaig and Torridon Primary Schools are not reasonable. Their response refers to Gaelic Medium Education catchment areas as overlaying a number of existing catchment areas applying 'particularly to urban areas'. The Guidance makes no distinction between urban and rural settings. The council should continue to consult Bòrd na Gàidhlig on their concerns.

3.5 There was a consensus that children who reside in the catchment area of Kinlochewe Primary School should have access to Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary School, should that be their parents' choice. It was felt that there were existing transport arrangements that could be used without incurring additional costs on the council. This approach was seen as supporting equity of access to Gaelic Medium Education.

4. Summary

4.1 Overall, the council's proposal is of educational benefit to children and parents who reside within the catchment areas for Bualnaluib, Gairloch and Poolewe Primary Schools. The proposal gives clarity to parents on how to access Gaelic Medium Education. For those residing in the catchment area for Kinlochewe Primary School, there is a consensus that parents should have the option to access Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary School, should they wish. Therefore, the catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education at Gairloch Primary School should overlay that of Bualnaluib, Gairloch, Kinlochewe and Poolewe Primary Schools. The council should define further how they will address children's safety while travelling on buses.

4.2 Given the closer proximity of the catchment area of Shieldaig Primary School to Lochcarron Primary School, it is a reasonable request that the council investigate whether children who reside in the catchment area of Shieldaig Primary School should have the option of accessing Gaelic Medium Education at Lochcarron Primary School. It is HM Inspectors' view that the shorter travelling distances may be beneficial in accessing Gaelic Medium Education at the primary stages. HM Inspectors have outlined in paragraph 3.4 some wider factors that the council should consider in making a final decision. It is important that the council's final decision takes account of the statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education to 'attract parents to choose Gaelic Medium Education

for their children'. A decision on Torridon Primary School should be made based on the mothballing arrangements that are in place. The council needs to continue to engage with all stakeholders, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in addressing the concerns outlined in section three of this report.

HM Inspectors
February 2020