



## **HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

### **EDUCATION AND LEARNING SERVICE**

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH GAELIC MEDIUM CATCHMENT AREAS FOR BUN-SGOIL GHÀIDHLIG INBHIR NIS, DINGWALL PRIMARY SCHOOL, MILLBANK PRIMARY SCHOOL, INVERNESS ROYAL ACADEMY, DINGWALL ACADEMY AND NAIRN ACADEMY

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal to establish Gaelic Medium (GM) catchment areas for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis, Dingwall Primary School, Millbank Primary School, Inverness Royal Academy, Dingwall Academy, and Nairn 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 meetings held on 5 and 19 September 2023.
- The report from Education Scotland.

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

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## 1.0 Background

- 1.2 Highland Council's Education Committee, at its meeting on 1 June 2023, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to establish Gaelic Medium catchment areas for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis, Dingwall Primary School, Millbank Primary School, Inverness Royal Academy, Dingwall Academy, and Nairn Academy.
- 1.3 The Proposal paper suggested that the new Gàidhlig Medium (GM) catchment area for Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis (BSGI) should overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of 33 primary schools.
- 1.4 The new GM catchment for Dingwall Primary would overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of 19 primary schools.
- 1.5 The new GM catchment for Millbank Primary would overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of 4 primary schools.
- 1.6 The new GM catchment for Inverness Royal Academy would overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of Inverness Royal Academy, Charleston Academy, Culloden Academy, Inverness High School, and Millburn Academy and part of the catchment area of Fortrose Academy.
- 1.7 The new GM catchment area for Dingwall Academy would overlay the current English Medium (EM) catchments of Dingwall Academy and Alness Academy, and part of the catchment area of Fortrose Academy.
- 1.8 The Proposal Paper also suggested formalising the current arrangements relating to Gàidhlig Medium Education (GME) in Nairn Academy, under which the catchment area for Nairn Academy will apply to both Gàidhlig Medium and English Medium education.
- 1.9 Existing primary school catchments for the provision of English Medium education will be unaffected.
- 1.10 Particular arrangements would apply to transporting pupils to GME from outlying EM catchments, as set out in the Proposal Paper.
- 1.11 **Appendix A** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendices B - D** are also appendices to the original proposal.

## 2.0 Consultation process

- 2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Monday 21 August 2023 to Friday 27 October 2023. 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, there was wide consultation with parents, staff, and children of the affected schools, as well as with the wider community.
- 2.3 The proposal document was advertised on the Highland Council website.
- 2.4 Public meetings were held in Nairn on 5 September and in Dingwall on 19 September. A meeting was also called for Inverness on 12 September but, no-one attended. Notes of the meetings in Nairn and Dingwall are at **Appendix 3 and Appendix 3a.**
- 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 4.** There were 10 written responses received during the consultation period. Copies of these responses can also be found at **Appendices 4i-4x.** Two responses were submitted on behalf of organisations (Comann nam Pàrant, and Bòrd na Gàidhlig), The other 8 responses were all from individual parents/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.

#### **Issue 1**

I would like to dispute why our address is not included in the Millbank catchment area for Gaelic education when the Bun-sgoil Ghaidhlig Inbhir Nis school which is going to be our catchment area is much further away than Millbank PS. Our address sits on the catchment line for Cawdor and Croy catchment area. I can understand for normal catchment areas the Croy/Cawdor line needs to be somewhere but for Gaelic Education why pupils would be sent to Inverness rather than Nairn, when Nairn is much closer. It does not seem sensible that you are just grouping current Nairn catchment areas together to get the Gaelic catchment area when looking at time to get to school Millbank is a much closer school than travelling all the way to Inverness.

#### **Response 1**

The proposed GM catchments are based on the existing EM catchments, and the address concerned lies with the Croy PS catchment area, albeit

close to the boundary. Although GM catchment areas overlap a number of EM catchments. it is logical to group the EM catchments for GM purposes and to keep the EM catchments as whole entities. The Council does not favour varying the detailed boundaries of each catchment, to introduce differences between EM and GM education boundaries.

## Issue 2

We live in Ardersier so closer to Nairn than Inverness travel time and our family and life is mainly in Ardersier and Nairn so sending our child to Inverness wouldn't be an option for us, this would mean we wouldn't choose Gaelic Medium for our 3 children which would be very sad considering the push for Gaelic speakers.

It wouldn't be beneficial to our children to go a city they have very little tie or connection to.

It would be longer time travelling for them also and age 5 years old this just doesn't seem a good use of their time or energy.

Would placement requests still be considered?

Our son starts p1 next year, then my daughter will start 2026 and our son will start 2029. We had made the decision we wanted all our children to go to GM in Millbank. We live in Ardersier but our life is in Ardersier/Nairn including family for childcare etc and I will likely work in Nairn in the future. So we had visited Millbank and I have enrolled on a Gaelic course in preparation.

The catchment areas had come as a surprise to us. We live in Inverness catchment if the catchment areas go ahead.

This is a huge concern as we won't send our children to school in Inverness as it just wouldn't make sense for us as a family. We would be very sad if our children weren't granted a placement request for Millbank so it has thrown our plans up the air a bit especially as it's only a few months until we apply for p1 and 11 months until our oldest starts p1.

Looking at the distances involved in the catchment area for Millbank and BSGI, it would be more appropriate for areas such as Ardersier and Croy to be included in the Millbank catchment area. This would also be beneficial to expand the number of GME pupils within Millbank and Nairn Academy at a time when both BSGI and IRA are running much nearer capacity than Millbank and Nairn Academy.

Ardersier -> Millbank = 6.7 miles

Ardersier -> BSGI = 12 miles

Ardersier -> Nairn Academy = 6.1 miles

Ardersier -> Inverness Royal Academy = 12.3 miles

Croy -> Millbank = 7.1 miles  
 Croy -> BSGI = 10.6 miles  
 Croy -> Nairn Academy = 7.3 miles  
 Croy -> Inverness Royal Academy = 10.9 miles

### Response 2

The issue of the appropriate GM catchment for Ardersier is considered in more detail at Section 10 below.

### Issue 3

We live in Nairn, within the catchment for Millbank Primary School. My daughters have both attended Gaelic Toddlers in the town, spent their preschool years at Croileagan Inbhir Narainn, have been through GME at Millbank Primary School and are both considered fluent Gaelic speakers. There is a prominently displayed banner in the town stating that bilingual education in GME is available from ages 3-18 within Nairn - but Nairn Academy is not delivering GME under your own definition.

<https://www.gaidhlig.scot/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Statutory-Guidance-for-Gaelic-Education.pdf>

On page 25 of this 48-page document it states:

2.15 The GME curriculum from S1 to S3 and into the Senior Phase (S4-S6) remains one based on the principle of immersion in Gaelic. It is considered essential that education authorities and schools identify the curricular areas and subjects, in addition to Gaelic, that are possible to deliver through the medium of Gaelic, based on the availability of staff and young people's choices.

2.16 Schools should aim to deliver a sufficient proportion of the secondary curriculum through the medium of Gaelic to enable young people to continue to develop their fluency in Gaelic. Schools and education authorities should plan for this, taking their lead from the subjects for which qualifications are available from the SQA (see paragraphs 2.18-19). Some secondary schools with GME will offer other subject provision and this will depend on local circumstances and teacher availability. Schools and education authorities should collaborate to develop secondary level GME curriculum opportunities, sharing of expertise, courses and a range of delivery methods, including the use of distance learning and technology.

Referring specifically back to the Consultation Document, Appendix A, Paragraph 6.1 it states that:

'The provision of GME at Nairn Academy is a relatively recent development....'

Out of my daughter's 32 periods per week, only 3 classes are in Gaelic - these are Gaelic language for fluent speakers. Nothing else (i.e., none of

the social or practical classes are being taught through the medium of Gaelic).

Frustratingly also, the 3 Gaelic lessons that she does receive are at the expense of another modern language.

I fought hard during her last term at Millbank Primary School for the option for her to receive transport to the IRA to continue true GME, where the current S1s get 4 Gaelic lesson for fluent speakers per week, plus Modern Studies, Geography, History, RMPS and PSE all in Gaelic - plus they receive French classes.

In your consideration regarding GME catchment areas, you must understand that currently insufficient quantity of Gaelic is being delivered to even call it GME.

Therefore families from Nairn wishing their children to continue with full Gaelic immersion must be given the option to continue it at IRA, with the provision of transport - GME, as defined in the above Statutory Guidance Document, is not available at any more local establishment. Pupils from Millbank commencing GME S1 at the IRA in session 2021-2022, and prior to this date, receive funded transport for the approximately 18 mile journey.

Subsequent S1 intakes (with the exception of the younger siblings of the above families) do not receive this option, and they are left to either sort their own transport arrangements, or to settle for non-GME (as described above) at Nairn Academy.

As parents of two children within the Nairn Millbank Primary School GM unit and one child within the Inverness Royal Academy GM unit, our comments are as follows:

Educational Benefits Statement – Introduction:

This paper states in the introduction section that the consultation seeks ‘...To formalise the current arrangements relating to Gàidhlig Medium Education (GME) in Nairn Academy, under which the catchment area for Nairn Academy will apply to both Gàidhlig Medium and English Medium education...’.

This statement implies that there is an existing agreed arrangement and that currently Nairn Academy offers a GME Education. However, both of these statements are far from accurate. Nairn Academy has never operated as a formal GME setting and as shown below is not operating currently as one, nor will it have the pupil demand in the future to operate as one.

Moreover, the removal of the longstanding transport for secondary GME pupils from Nairn to the IRA back in 2022, was never subject to any formal consultation and or public discussion, instead it was removed without warning and justification to the secondary intake for academic year 2022.

Therefore the assertion that this consultation is to ratify a previously agreed position is wholly inaccurate.

The consultation implies that Nairn Academy is operating a GME currently. This assertion is fundamentally incorrect, as recognised and confirmed by the Council panel at the public meeting on 5th September 2023, Nairn Academy only has 2no. students with S1 and 3no. Students in S2 wishing to participate in GM.

Additionally, these students are only being taught a very limited timetable which precludes teaching any subjects within the medium of GM and the students within S1 who have elected to take the GM language course are doing so at the expense of a foreign language, which we understand might not comply with educational requirements.

Whereas it is understood that GME students within Dingwall Academy are taught History, Geography and Modern Studies all within the medium of GM and GME students at the IRA are taught History, Geography, Modern Studies, RMPS and PSE within the medium of GM. Therefore, until Nairn Academy can offer an equivalent and compliant GME experience it is unrealistic to expect parents with Nairn to accept a substandard GME when compared to neighbouring schools.

Whilst it is admirable that the Council wishes to develop a GME unit at secondary level within Nairn, and one which we would fully support. The current consultation demonstrates that when the Nairn Academy proposed catchment is compared to both the IRA and Dingwall Academy proposed catchments, a Nairn Academy one is insufficient to provide sufficient students to warrant a GME unit.

This is based on Nairn Academy GME proposed catchment being served by just 4no. primary schools, whilst the proposed IRA catchment is served by 33no. primary schools and the proposed Dingwall Catchment is served by 19no primary schools.

Furthermore, Millbank Primary School in Nairn has been operating a GME unit for several years and currently operates two GME classes across the whole school – GM 1-3 & GM 4-7 with a roll of 28 pupils. Over the years of operating the GME unit in Millbank, the GME school role has been fairly static and is unlikely to increasing significantly due to the size of the primary school catchment and the current role of the GM nursery within the town. As such, it can be forecasted that the number of pupils undertaking GME at Nairn Academy will not increase significant and instead will be a relatively low number of pupils and one which would be unsustainable to support a GME within Nairn Academy.

Whereas Dingwall Academy is fed from a GME unit with a roll of 75 pupils and IRA is fed from a GME unit of 214 pupils. Both of which are significantly higher than the Nairn Academy Catchment and therefore have the ability to



sustain the existing GME units associated with the secondary GME within these locations.

Given the above has demonstrated that Nairn Academy is currently not offering a GME education and has insufficient demand in the future to deliver one. It is realistic to assume parents of the current pupils enrolled within the Millbank primary GME unit to want a 'like for like' education as being offered in neighbouring catchments and one that satisfies the legislative requirements for GME.

Therefore, it is argued that the most suitable option would be to reinstate the transport of Nairn Academy GME pupils to the IRA for secondary GME as the most appropriate and would not be adversely prohibited due to distance between Millbank PS and the IRA; as this distance is approximately an 18mile journey, which is similar to a number of travel distances proposed for the other catchments (namely, Cromarty Primary to Dingwall Academy at 19.2miles, Beaully Primary to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis at 17.6 miles, Teanassie Primary to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis at 17.2 miles, Foyers Primary to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis at 18.2 miles, Stratherrick Primary to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis at 18.1 miles, Cromarty Primary to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis at 25.9 miles and Resolis Primary to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis at 20.9 miles).

Doing so, would offer the parents of the Nairn primary GME unit the option of either seeking a full, proper and comparative secondary GME at the IRA if they so wish, or retaining their children within Nairn to attend Nairn Academy where they can accept a lesser GM education.

In principle Bòrd na Gàidhlig supports the establishment of a clear catchment area for the GME provision in the Nairn ASG, both Secondary and Primary provision, as proposed by the Highland Council.

We note a range of concerns raised by parents concerning GME provision within the Nairn ASG and strongly recommend that urgent steps are taken to improve the position including the following:

A plan be put in place to secure additional resource to deliver an expanded GME curriculum (this relates to both delivery of support from teachers outwith the ASG and recruitment of additional teachers). We recommend that the plan for curriculum development be constructed with support from the Education Scotland, Scottish Government Gaelic and Scots Division (Specific Grant Scheme and potentially the Gaelic Capital Fund). The Education Team at Bòrd na Gàidhlig can also provide additional professional advice and support.

The GME Curriculum Offer at Nairn Academy should be expanded each session.

The annual School Improvement Plan and Annual Standards and Quality Report should clearly indicate for parents the improvements in the Curriculum Offer being delivered each session.

It is crucial that the GME provision within the Nairn ASG is envisioned as a 3-18 service providing parents with Early Years, Primary and Secondary education of a high quality. Parents have raised concerns regarding the 3-18 vision. We recommend strongly that the Early Years aspect of the 3-18 provision is reviewed, and an action plan created to ensure that interest in GME within the community is fully exploited so that across the 3-18 GME provision parental confidence in GME Early Years, Primary and Secondary is increased.

Amongst the aims of the establishment of catchments exercise are the reinforcement of parental confidence in GME, the establishment of clarity around service provision and the creation of the conditions where local GME services will attract more and more families to establish a “critical mass”. There are clear indications from the consultation exercise that considerable work requires to be done to build confidence. Bòrd na Gàidhlig is of the view that development planning should be put in place so that in the Standards and Quality Report for session 2023-24 there is clear evidence of progress, which will then be sustained each session thereafter.

### **Response 3**

Having listened to parental views and as a result of this consultation, The Highland Council will continue to provide transport to Inverness Royal Academy, should parents wish to send their children there for GME. As we are establishing a catchment area for Nairn ASG, the hope would be that as we further develop the curriculum within GME at Nairn Academy, then children and young people will be able to remain within their catchment school for GME and that parental confidence in the curriculum being offered is increase and a sustainable model is in place.

In addition, The Highland Council will continue to further develop the GME provision at Nairn Academy and across the wider ASG in Nairn, with a view to this being a more sustained 3-18 curriculum within the catchment boundary for the Nairn ASG.

### **Issue 4**

As a parent of two children in the catchment area, and friends with a number of local parents who have voiced the same concerns, but say they don't have the time to go to meetings or write letters to council, I feel I need to protest the time and money being spent on a dying language which can be learned in later life if that is an interest. I was born in Nairn, and chose to return here to raise my children, I would hope they will do the same, There is currently no option to learn Spanish in Nairn Academy, despite it being widely spoken worldwide, we need our children to learn across a broad

spectrum in order to find options in the workplace, and I object to Gaelic being pushed as an agenda when there has been no demand for it. Please reconsider spending the time and money on, say, fixing our run-down buildings, assisting this staffing problems, or supporting our children who, at the end of the day, have to take the skills and subjects learned in the classroom into the wider world.

#### **Response 4**

The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 was passed by the Scottish Parliament with a view to securing the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland, commanding equal respect to the English language. Public authorities must demonstrate how that principle will be achieved and maintained in practice.

The Highland Council has a clear focus on increasing Gaelic usage and the number of Gaelic speakers. The Council continues to be committed to providing and enhancing Gaelic Medium Education, recognising this as one of the key drivers in sustaining and developing Gaelic.

#### **Issue 5**

We live in the Heights of Achterneed which is a small single track road. At present, pupils attending Dingwall Academy are transported from our area on a large 30+ seater coach. It used to be a 16+ seater mini bus and given the small number of kids I'm unclear why a large coach is used on such a narrow windy steep road. A mini bus is used to transport primary children to Strathpeffer Primary.

The proposal to transport primary age GME children via the Dingwall Academy coach makes us feel concerned. I've listed our concerns and questions below.

- 1) Will GME primary kids be dropped at Dingwall Primary prior to the coach going onto Dingwall Academy?
- 2) Dingwall Primary is very congested at drop off and pick up times. Where will the coach drop the kids off and how will it turn safely?
- 3) How will the safety of the primary age children be monitored whilst they are on the coach? On a large coach on our narrow windy steep road, the driver will be concentrating on the road not what is happening on the coach. Expecting very young kids of 5/6 years old to sit amongst teenagers doesn't sit comfortably with us unless properly monitored. The large coach is currently more than half empty.
- 4) Would it be possible for a minibus to be used instead? We appreciate that depends on the numbers of children but at present we understand that a 16-21 seater would be sufficient for GME primary kids and academy

pupils. This seems like a good compromise but is Highland Council able to dictate what vehicle the bus company uses?

### **Response 5**

There are currently 23 pupils listed for travel on this route, including 3 for Dingwall Primary. Pupils transfer to another bus at Dingwall Academy for onward to the Primary [most are on shared transport with the Academy pupils and get off those buses and onto one].

Children are dropped off on Old Evanton Road and are then seen across the road by the Crossing Patroller.

The rural nature of the Highlands means that there are large areas where it is only practical, for both financial and logistical reasons, to run one vehicle for the children in an area. From an environmental perspective, not running additional vehicles also keeps the levels of emissions down. This means there will be occasions when that children attending Dingwall Academy and Dingwall Primary are required to travel on one bus. With the lack of services available in rural areas, together with problems in driver availability, this practice is common across the Highland Council area.

It is possible that this vehicle then goes on to do other work carrying larger passenger numbers but as we have 23 pupils listed at present, this is the minimum size of vehicle the bus company would need to put on the route.

### **Issue 6**

I would support the town of Beaully to be added to the Dingwall catchment rather than Inverness.

Inverness has a significant level of growth to the East and there will be sustained pressure on accommodating the demand within Inverness for the foreseeable future. Adding Beaully to the Dingwall catchment removes some of that pressure from Inverness and Dingwall is a more straightforward journey from Beaully than the road through Clachnaharry to Inverness. Since the trains go through both towns there are public transport options available for older pupils of the academy and Dingwall Academy is better connected to the train station than the IRA which is nowhere near Inverness rail station. I think the historic division between Inverness and Ross shire was between Beaully and Muir of Ord but this historic boundary in administrative terms does not reflect the reality of the towns of Dingwall and Beaully and the connections between them in the present day. Kids in Beaully are poorly served by both English medium and Gaelic medium educational facilities in that the primary school has recently had its replacement shelved from the capital program and the lack of secondary education in the town which leaves an awful gap between Drumnadrochit and Inverness where pupils have long travel to secondary school despite living in established settlements like Beaully. Dingwall is closer to Beaully

and having Beauly within the Dingwall catchment would reduce the pressure on Inverness Royal academy and also on the traffic between Beauly and Inverness.

I would like to add that I would consider the Nairn catchment to be too small and it ought to be extended West to include Ardersier, Croy, Tornagrain and the area around the airport. The level of housing growth allocated east of Inverness is going to place huge pressure on Inverness Royal Academy and I don't think the IRA will have the capacity to take on the demand that will result from that size of area. It would be short sighted not to use this opportunity to rationalise the catchments so that they take on a more equal share of the demand. The catchments as currently proposed run the risk of having to build a further school when it becomes evident that the IRA cannot meet the demand within its catchment. And given that process is glacial in pace, it would be regrettable that students and parents would have to work within a pressurized sub standard environment waiting on that solution which was so obviously avoidable at this very stage. Also how is it justifiable for students to travel from Ardersier all the way to General ease road in Inverness which is not exactly in a central location? They are obviously closer to Nairn and should be accommodated there.

On another vein - I am not clear on whether developer contributions will be sought towards capacity constraints in Gaelic medium schools as the councils existing developer contributions supplementary guidance makes it clear that Gaelic schools could secure funding towards them in this way but we simply haven't up until now. The growth in demand for Gaelic medium education in the region surely makes this position untenable and new developments including small development of 1-4 houses should be making payments towards Gaelic medium capacity constraints accordingly.

### **Response 6**

The Council has given careful consideration to the suggestion that Beauly should be part of the Dingwall GM catchment, but believes that the the boundary between the Dingwall and Charleston ASGs represents a suitable boundary between the Dingwall and BSGI/IRA GM catchments. In coming to this view we have taken into account that only one representation has been received on this issue.

It will be open to any parent living in Beauly and seeking GM education for their children, to submit a placing request to access GME in Dingwall.

The issue of Ardersier is considered at Section 10 below.

Currently developer contributions for school building projects are typically linked to an assessment of the impact of the development within a defined school catchment. Historically, GM schools have not had defined catchments, as opting for GME is a matter of parental choice.

It has therefore been difficult to demonstrate the impact of a development on numbers attending Gaelic Medium education, to the degree that would justify a contribution.

Highland Council has been working through an exercise to create Gaelic Medium catchments in Highland, for those schools that offer GME. In that context, we will, in the future, be considering the issue of how developer contributions might be applied in relation to GME.

### **Issue 7**

Whilst we are in general agreement with the proposed catchment for Bunscoil Gàidhlig Inbhir Nis and Inverness Royal Academy, there are, as noted in the consultation document, a number of children who currently attend BSGI from outwith the proposed catchment. We welcome the re-assurance that these children, along with their siblings in the future, will continue to be supported with transport. We are aware that there may be an issue with capacity in the future at BSGI as GME continues to grow and parents should also be given re-assurance that any future placing requests for siblings of pupils currently attending the schools will be successful.

We also note from the consultation document that a number of pupils attend BSGI from the “Nairnside / Croy” area and we are aware that there has been discussion as part of the Nairn consultation on including Croy and Ardersier in the Nairn catchment rather than for BSGI. Whilst we appreciate that this may have potential to improve numbers in Nairn, we believe that BSGI as a stand-alone Gaelic school is a more attractive option for parents and that making this change could have a negative impact on uptake of GME from these areas.

It is difficult to fully comment on the proposal to include Avoch and North Kessock in the BSGI catchment with Tore and Munloch in the Dingwall catchment without more evidence on which would be the more attractive option for parents. That said, as there are currently pupils attending BSGI from Munloch, it would seem to indicate that families would be more inclined to travel to Inverness for GME. It is also worth noting that Inverness has the more attractive option for parents with a dedicated Gaelic school compared to provision in Dingwall which is provided in a mainly English medium environment. Educationally the total immersive experience provided in a Gaelic school has benefits and we feel this should be taken into account and consideration given to including Tore and Munloch in the BSGI catchment as well as Avoch and North Kessock. GME provision at Inverness Royal Academy also offers a wider GME experience for pupils.

We are in general agreement with the proposed catchment for Dingwall Primary School and Dingwall Academy, apart from the inclusion of Tore and Munloch (see previous comment). However, given some of the distances involved and travelling times, particularly from the Fortrose ASG we hope

that there will be opportunities in the future to have other GME provision within the area.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig recommends that the Local Authority continue to engage with communities in Fortrose ASG with a view to setting up GME provision at a future point.

There is also potential to further develop the current provision in Dingwall. Highland Council have in the past considered establishing a dedicated Gaelic school in Dingwall and we would support this as the next logical step for GME in this area. We are also aware that there are currently some issues with pre-school provision, and we hope this situation will be speedily rectified before it has too much of a detrimental effect on enrolment for GME.

CnP agree with the catchment for Millbank Primary School and Nairn Academy. Although it is a small catchment area there is potential for growth in GME from pre-school through to secondary. We note the current restrictions in numbers in Croileagan, which is a partner service nursery run by an English medium organisation, and this situation should be reviewed by the council with a view to establishing council run Gaelic medium early learning and childcare provision. This would allow numbers to increase and lead to an increase in enrolment for primary provision. We also note parental concerns around secondary provision at Nairn Academy. We welcomed the fairly recent introduction of Gaelic provision at the Academy which allows Gaelic medium pupils to continue with Gaelic in their local school, remain with their peer group from primary and participate in after-school activities. Given the level of concern from parents we hope that the council will continue to support Nairn Academy to expand provision for GME. There are also examples of good practice from a number of schools who although they have limited subject teaching in Gaelic maximise the opportunities that pupils have to develop their Gaelic language skills through participation in projects and activities such as the national debate. We would also encourage Highland Council to consider opportunities for more collaboration with other schools such as Inverness Royal Academy, and involvement in community activities such as are provided through Comunn na Gàidhlig.

We note the proposal, for all catchments, that the default position will be for the council to utilise current secondary school transport for all provision. We are concerned that this may not always be appropriate for very young children and would remind the council that any proposal should have the potential to attract parents to choose GME for their children. Transport should not be a barrier to accessing GME. Promotion and Information The council hopes that setting the catchment areas will provide clarification for parents on their entitlement to GME and this is welcome. We hope that the council will ensure that all parents in the associated schools are made aware prior to enrolment for primary education that they do have an opportunity, supported by the council, to access GME. We would also expect the council to continue to promote the opportunity for parents to

submit a request for GMPE in line with the Education Act (Scotland) 2016.

### **Response 7**

Placing requests are governed by national legislation. The assumption is that placing requests are granted, but there are certain circumstances where we refuse them. In fact, where those circumstances apply we are obliged to refuse them. Most commonly, requests must be refused where they would result in an unreasonable cost to the taxpayer. There are other specified circumstances where we would refuse a request, but all requests would be judged against the same criteria, no matter where they were from or which schools were involved.

The issue of the appropriate GM catchments for Ardersier and Croy is considered in more detail at Section 10 below.

The comment from Comann nam Pàrant suggesting a change to the GM catchment encompassing Tore and Munloch, was the only such response. Whilst we acknowledge some merit in the argument, on balance we propose to maintain the proposal that Tore and Munloch are included within the Dingwall GM catchment.

The Council's Proposal Paper made it clear that any identified parental demand for future local provision of GME from within any of the primary schools identified above, would be assessed in accordance with the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 and the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education (2017).

The Council will be reviewing educational provision in Dingwall, as part of the newly adopted Highland Investment Plan, which aims to transform the asset base of Highland Council, such as schools and other premises to centres of community service delivery. A number of schools delivering Gaelic Medium Education currently will be in scope for investment through the plan, and dialogue will take place with relevant stakeholders on this in relation to specific projects, such as Dingwall.

In respect of Croileagan Inbhir Narainn, it is the Council's policy to deliver childcare and early education in collaboration with partners, and to support communities and partners in providing childcare solutions.

The Scottish Government has issued Operating Guidance on The National Standard for Early Learning and Childcare Providers. That Guidance specifies that their approach is 'provider neutral' and is underpinned by a National Standard that all settings – regardless of whether they are in the public, private or third sector, including childminders – have to meet in order to be able to deliver funded ELC.

For families this means that they will be able to access high quality funded ELC with the provider of their choice – in the public, private, or third sector,



including childminders – if that provider meets the criteria set out in the National Standard, wishes to deliver the funded entitlement, has a space available, is able to offer the funded hours in-line with their local authority's ELC delivery plan (subject to the capacity of the setting), and has or is willing to enter into a contract with their local authority to deliver the funded hours.

The principles around the organisation of school transport in Highland are set out in Response 5 above.

### **Issue 8**

In principle Bòrd na Gàidhlig supports the establishment of a clear catchment area for the GME provision in the Dingwall, Alness and Fortrose ASG, both Secondary and Primary provision, as proposed by the Highland Council.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig notes that there remain some challenges around travelling times and ensuring that GME as an option continues to be attractive for parents.

The travelling times and distances for Strathconon and Cromarty remain outwith the general interpretation that reasonable travelling distance is less than 15 miles. Bòrd na Gàidhlig recommends that the Local Authority work with local communities to explore the potential for setting up GME provision within the local area in these areas.

It will be important to continue planning GME provision within this ASG with a vision for a 3-18 set of GME services.

In principle Bòrd na Gàidhlig supports the establishment of a clear catchment area for the GME provision in the Inverness ASGs, both Secondary and Primary provision, as proposed by the Highland Council.

Similar to Strathconon and Cromarty, Bòrd na Gàidhlig notes that distances for some schools are outwith the 15-mile radius though travelling times are not as challenging. However, again there may be scope for developing further GME provision within local areas to ensure that a more local GME service is provided.

In conclusion Bòrd na Gàidhlig recognises the complexity of provision in the listed ASGs and commends the work officers have done to find solutions to a wide range of challenges. Bòrd na Gàidhlig recommends that whatever the outcome of decision-making regarding catchments, a publicity initiative is developed so that parents can easily understand where their GME service is located and how they might access transport support.

**Response 8**

See Response 7 above for the Council's current policy on identified demand for GME in primary schools.

On current projections the school roll at Strathconon will fall to one in August 2025, so GME at that school would not be viable in the foreseeable future.

The Council already widely publicises the availability of GME through its information to parents about school enrolment as well as more generally on its website. Individual schools also promote the availability of GME.

- 4.2 The note of the public meeting in Nairn is at Appendix 3. The meeting was dominated by the issues around GME at Nairn Academy (see Issue 3 above) and by discussions about the best GM catchments for Ardersier and Croy (Issue 2 above). At the Dingwall meeting (see note at Appendix 3a) there was discussion about the best GM catchment for Beauly (Issue 6 above) and about GM Early Years provision in Dingwall.

## 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 6**.
- 5.2 In their report, Education Scotland HM Inspectors agreed 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.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 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.

- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 Inspectors recommended that the council should provide further clarity and support on travel and transport. Particularly, Ardersier and Croy to Nairn; Alness, Beaully, Cromarty, Culbokie, Munloch 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.

- 5.6 In summary, Education Scotland noted that the Council are fulfilling statutory duties when setting up catchment areas for Gàidhlig Medium Education. Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors supported 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 appropriate action being taken on the issues raised in their report and described above. 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.
- 5.7 The reference in Education Scotland's report to the sgoil-àraich not operating is a reference to the former Croileagan Inbhir Pheofharain, a privately-run playgroup which collapsed in September 2022. GM pre-school provision in Dingwall is now provided under the management of Dingwall Primary School and the Highland Council.
- 5.8 Currently there is sufficient capacity at Croileagan Inbhir Narainn (11 children registered, capacity of 16).
- 5.9 The nursery class at Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlih Inbhir Nis has a registered capacity 106, including 76 children in the 3-25 age group. For the 2024-25 session, the total number of early years children is 97 but only 37 of them are full time. There are a high number of blended placements, more than half of the intake. Fifteen children do not join until January or April 2025. The maximum number in any given day is 87 but not until April 2025. There are only 69 on a Friday, even with the Jan/Apr intakes. In August the busiest day of the week is Thursday with 72 children, Fridays will only have 59. It would be possible to allocate Jan/Apr starts different times/days and still accommodate them within the current rooms/capacity. It is not unusual to do this in busy settings.
- 5.10 The Council's responses to the other matters raised by Education Scotland are set out at Responses 2 and 3, and 5-8 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 The proposal does not change the existing arrangements for school transport.

## **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 There were no alleged omissions or inaccuracies.

## **10.0 Overall Review of Consultation Exercise**

10.1 Several respondents to the consultation exercise suggested that Ardersier should be part of the Nairn GM catchment rather than the BSGI catchment. This point was also made by one respondent from Croy. See Issue 2 above.

10.2 To further inform its decision on the above responses, Highland Council undertook an online survey of parents of primary and pre-school children, who were interested in GME. There were 3 responses from parents in Ardersier, all of whom favoured being part of the Millbank PS/Nairn Academy catchment for the purposes of GME. One response from Croy suggested that community should remain within the BSGI/IRA catchments for the purposes of GME.

10.3 After reviewing the consultation exercise and the results of the subsequent survey, the Council recommends that, for GME purposes, Ardersier should become part of the GME catchment for Millbank PS and Nairn Academy, but that Croy PS should remain with the Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis/Inverness Royal Academy GM catchments.

10.4 The new catchment boundaries are illustrated at **Appendices 7 and 8**.

10.5 The issues relating to Beauly, Tore and Munloch are covered at Response 6 and 7 above.

## **11.0 Legal issues**

11.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

## **12.0 Conclusion**

12.1 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 6 above.

12.2 The Education Scotland Inspector held discussions with relevant consultees 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.

12.3 On reviewing all of the submissions, the note of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; officials conclude that the Proposal to create GM catchment areas for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis, Dingwall Primary School, Millbank Primary School, Inverness Royal Academy, Dingwall Academy, and Nairn Academy, should be implemented, but with the amendment that, for the purposes of GME, Ardersier should become part of the GME catchment for Millbank PS and Nairn Academy.

### **13.0 Recommendation**

13.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council proceeds with the course of action set out at Paragraph 12.3 above.

**Kate Lackie**

**Assistant Chief Executive**

**16 August 2024**