

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by East Dunbartonshire Council to make changes to the catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education.

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* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of East Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to make changes to the catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education from the beginning of the academic session 2018. The council's Gaelic Medium Primary Education provision is currently at Meadowburn Primary School. The proposal will define the whole of East Dunbartonshire as the catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education at Meadowburn 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 a copy of 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. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all legislative obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people currently in Gaelic Medium Education; 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; and

- visits to Meadowburn Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees. This included representatives of Comann nam Pàrant, the national organisation for parents of those in Gaelic Medium Education.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 East Dunbartonshire Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The consultation process ran from 1 November 2017 to 13 December 2017. During that time, the council held a public meeting at Meadowburn Primary School. Almost all statutory consultees, including parents/carers, children and staff were informed of the consultation. The council has not sought the formal view of Bòrd na Gàidhlig as a statutory consultee. The council published documentation for the consultation on its website. They also distributed papers to a full range of stakeholders and interested parties. The council put in place suitable arrangements to enable interested parties to respond to the proposal, whether that be electronically or in writing. Thirty-five written responses were received. Almost all of these responses received supported the proposal. The council undertook a consultation with pupils to ensure their views were sought. Overall, consultees supported the council's proposal to establish the catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education at Meadowburn Primary School as the whole of East Dunbartonshire Council. A few concerns were expressed.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 East Dunbartonshire Council is responding to the *Education (Scotland) Act 2016* to support and promote Gaelic by setting a catchment area for the Gaelic Medium Education provision at Meadowburn Primary School. The council has secured strong support for its proposal. The consultees appreciate that the process for securing a place in Gaelic Medium Education will be more straightforward. In particular, parents welcome that their request for Gaelic Medium Education will no longer be subject to a placing request if they reside outwith the English medium catchment for Meadowburn Primary School. Parents have justifiable concerns about a few aspects of the proposal. In taking its proposal forward, the council needs to engage with stakeholders to address these concerns as outlined in this report.

3.2 Stakeholders raised concern that the council's paper refers to Gaelic Medium Education within the council as only being available at the primary stages. The council is not recognising that the provision for Gaelic Medium Education in the Sgoil Àraich (nursery), and at Bishopbriggs Academy, constitutes Gaelic Medium Education. Parents feel that this has been a missed opportunity to have a catchment which reflects current provision for Gaelic Medium Education. The council should continue to work with parents to support and promote continuity and progression in Gaelic Medium Education.

3.3 Staff at Meadowburn Primary School felt that the proposal would help them plan better the curriculum for Gaelic Medium Education, particularly for transitions. In the final report, it would be beneficial for there to be a more comprehensive statement of such educational benefits. Many stakeholders felt that the proposal had potential to increase parental interest in enrolling their children in Gaelic Medium Education. If this was to be the case, parents have important, pragmatic issues that should be taken forward by the council. These include ensuring that there are safe traffic arrangements at the school. For others, it was crucial that the impact on capacity in English medium provision was not reduced at the expense of Gaelic Medium Education. Parents request that the council continues to plan strategically with them in taking forward Gaelic Medium Education.

4. Summary

East Dunbartonshire Council's proposal to set a catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education has potential to increase parental confidence in the Gaelic sector. Almost all stakeholders support and recognise that the proposal is taking forward a duty to support and promote Gaelic Medium Education. In finalising its report, the council should be clearer that it is setting a catchment area at the primary stages of Gaelic Medium Education. The council should also use the definitions for Gaelic Medium Education as set out in the Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017. In finalising its report, the council should fulfil its statutory duty to consult with Bòrd na Gàidhlig and take forward, as appropriate, any views that they may have.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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