

# **Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010**

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to:**

- **establish a Gaelic Medium Education catchment area for Ullapool Primary School. The new catchment area will overlay the current English medium catchment areas of Ullapool Primary School, Achiltibuie Primary School, Badcaul Primary School, Lochinver Primary School and Stoer Primary School. Particular arrangements will apply for transport to Ullapool from the latter four catchment area; and**
- **formalise the current arrangements relating to Gaelic Medium Education in Ullapool High School, under which the catchment area for Ullapool High School will apply to both Gaelic and English Medium Education.**

January 2019

## 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 proposal to establish Gaelic Medium Education (GME) catchment areas for Ullapool Primary School and Ullapool High 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. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all statutory 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 of the schools; any other users; children and young people 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;
- visits to Ullapool Primary School, Badcaul Primary School, Lochinver Primary School, Achiltibuie Primary School and Ullapool High School, including discussions with relevant consultees; and
- discussions as relevant to the consultation, including with Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

## 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 consultation process ran from 29 October 2018 to 10 December 2018. During that time, the council held a public meeting at Ullapool Primary School. The meeting was attended by five members of the public. Announcements were placed in the local press and on the council's

online services. Statutory consultees, including parents/carers, children, staff and Bòrd na Gàidhlig were informed of the consultation. The council also confirmed that Comann nam Pàrant were advised of the proposal, although not included in the consultee list. 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. Five written responses were received which raised some concerns about the proposal. These included a response from Bòrd na Gàidhlig in which they expressed concerns on aspects of the proposal to establish catchment areas for GME.

### 3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The Highland Council's proposal is responding to legislation, which includes establishing catchment areas for GME provisions. The pupil numbers opting for GME at Ullapool Primary School are increasing. A pattern is emerging which shows that almost all children at Ullapool Primary School are opting for GME rather than English Medium Education (EME). These children are almost all from the existing catchment area for EME. However, there are a few children from out with the existing catchment area for whom parents have opted for GME. Almost all consultees for the proposal emphasised the importance of safeguarding the right of parents who currently choose GME for their children, as well as the right to GME remaining an option in the future. They highlighted as a potential benefit of the proposal that parents would not have to make a placing request for GME at Ullapool Primary School, or request transport. The proposal would also give parents a guarantee of securing transport.

3.2 There are complex and sensitive issues for the council to manage within the parameters of this consultation. Their Gaelic Language Plan reinforces how they will support national priorities to support growth and sustainability of Gaelic. One of the purposes of this proposal is to make GME as widely accessible as possible. The council is promoting the principles of best value for sustaining schools in rural areas. Some of the schools affected by this consultation are in very remote rural areas and have very small pupil rolls. One of the schools in the Associated School Group (ASG), Scoraig Primary School, is not on the national road network. Almost all consultees agreed that it was not practical to include Scoraig Primary School within the proposed GME catchment area. Stoer Primary School is mothballed. Should it re-open, the council should ascertain if there is a demand for GME. In very rural areas, some consultees are concerned that the option of GME at Ullapool Primary School will adversely impact on the future of local schools. At the same time, parents and educationalists understand the impact of national shortages of teachers for GME, and challenges of recruiting and retaining staff in some rural areas. This, for them, is a reason to be supportive of the proposal to set up a GME catchment for Ullapool Primary School. However, there is a concern from a number of consultees that some of the distances to be travelled are not reasonable, particularly for young children. There are also a number of consultees who have concerns about the safety of young children travelling on buses. The council's own proposal paper refers to 'the long distances involved in travelling' it also goes on to say that the council is not 'expecting any significant impact on school rolls. Nor do we expect any impact on staff within the schools of the Ullapool ASG'. The council should continue to work with stakeholders in addressing these concerns. The council's statement on the educational benefits of this proposal should articulate more detail of the benefits of the proposal to current and future pupils. In so doing, they should take account of the concerns that have been raised.

3.3 Bòrd na Gàidhlig's response to the consultation highlighted some concerns on the proposal. Bòrd na Gàidhlig referred to GME catchment areas as overlaying a number of EME catchment areas as applying 'particularly to urban areas'. The guidance makes no distinction between urban and rural settings. Bòrd na Gàidhlig have offered to work with the council to explore solutions to the concerns that they raised. The council has advised HM Inspectors that they will continue to

work with Bòrd na Gàidhlig. They have also given written clarification that, in their final report, they will give clearer detail of how they will continue to implement the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017 to set up more local GME provision, should there be demand for that in future. Through time, such measures may assist in reducing travel times. The council's final report should clarify their approach to regular promotion of GME, which would assist in addressing concerns raised on attracting parents to choose GME.

3.4 Consultees strongly supported the proposed establishment of a GME catchment area for Ullapool High School. However, they expressed concern at the lack of continuity offered by the high school with the primary stages. Parents showed strong interest in working with the headteacher and staff to increase the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence through Gaelic. A number of parents of children at EME primary stages expressed an interest in their children accessing Gaelic (Learners) as part of Language Learning in Scotland A 1+2 Approach.

3.5 A small minority of consultees highlighted that there is an area south of the Kylesku Bridge that is part of Scourie Primary School's catchment area. These pupils transfer to Ullapool High School rather than Kinlochbervie High School, to which other pupils at Scourie Primary School transfer. In its final report, the council should clarify further the arrangements for Kylesku Bridge, should parents be requesting GME which is consistently progressive.

## 4. Summary

Overall, the council's proposal is of educational benefit to some children and parents in that it increases accessibility to GME. At this time, the proposal makes the most appropriate use of resources, while meeting current demand for GME. The council has some reasonable concerns to address in taking the proposal forward, as detailed in section three of this report. They should give more detail on the educational benefits of this proposal, which are specific to GME in their proposed catchment area. It is important that they clarify further their strategy for promoting the availability of GME and responding to parents' requests for setting up of new GME provisions. They should define further how they will address children's safety while travelling on buses. 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  
January 2019**