

Gaelic Medium Education

Education Scotland is required by legislation to inspect Gaelic Medium Education (GME). From 1 January 2012 to 30 June 2016, we inspected Gaelic provision in 42 early learning and childcare settings, and primary and secondary schools. This included Gaelic Medium schools and early learning and childcare settings, and schools where there is English and Gaelic Medium and Learner Education within the same setting.

Overall, we found that most children and young people in GME were making good progress in developing their fluency in Gaelic throughout the broad general education. By the senior phase, attainment in Gàidhlig as a subject is strong. In early learning and childcare settings, however, children could be making better progress by having more consistent approaches to total immersion⁹ in the language.

Interest in the role of Gaelic (Learners) as an additional language and the development of GME in some areas of Scotland is growing. To support this demand, there is a need to ensure the availability of sufficient practitioners and initial and career-long professional learning opportunities, and good quality teaching resources which are bespoke to GME.

How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Across most stages, inspectors found that staff were working effectively to create supportive relationships in which children and young people were motivated to learn.

In the most effective early learning and childcare settings we visited, staff planned a rich variety of activities through the medium of high-quality Gaelic. This was helping children learn the language as part of total immersion. However, in many cases further improvements were required in the way staff interacted with children in Gaelic during play activities. In too many settings inspectors noted that staff only provided a few learning activities through Gaelic, such as 'welcome time' or singing songs. As a result we found that children were not making enough progress in learning Gaelic.

Most of the primary schools we inspected were making good use of [national advice](#) to improve the opportunities children have to learn through Gaelic. However, we noted that in secondary schools, staff needed to make much more use of national advice to ensure that young people have significantly greater opportunities to learn through Gaelic. Across sectors, factors which we found to be preventing children learning consistently through Gaelic included a lack of shared understanding of best practice in GME, staffing shortages and, on occasion, teachers' limited fluency in Gaelic.

At the primary stages, children's experiences were frequently enhanced by working with partners who were very fluent in Gaelic. Inspectors highlighted that a useful next step would be to ensure clear progression in children's learning through these Gaelic-rich activities which continues through the secondary stages. This should include the use of formal award schemes. Staff should support children and young people to recognise the important skills for learning, life and work which they are developing. They should also work with partners, to help young people understand the career opportunities available to people who are fluent in Gaelic.

⁹ The early stage of learning through the medium of Gaelic, and where no other language is used, is referred to as 'total immersion'.

Overall, at the primary stages and from S1 to S3 inspectors found that most children and young people in GME made good progress in developing their fluency in Gaelic. Children's and young people's skills in talking in Gaelic were often strengthened by participating in learning experiences such as debating and drama. We observed that on most occasions, staff used clear criteria to help children and young people know how to be successful in developing their skills in writing.

We found that at the primary stages staff now have a clearer understanding of the importance of developing strong and fluent skills in reading Gaelic before beginning to read in English. Inspectors noted that children and young people needed to engage with a range of Gaelic texts in order to develop the necessary language to analyse the writer's craft through the medium of Gaelic.

Our evidence shows that within the broad general education schools need to have better arrangements in place for assessing and tracking children's and young people's progress and attainment in GME. Staff should continue to plan a range of assessment which takes account of the distinctive approaches to GME. When assessing English language, staff need to recognise that children develop English language later in the curriculum than their peers learning through English-medium education.

Overall, attainment in Gàidhlig in the senior phase is strong. Most young people entered for National Qualifications from SCQF level 5 to 7 for Gàidhlig attained a pass at A-C.

How well are children and young people supported to learn and develop?

Inspectors found that children and young people in primary and secondary schools were generally supported well in their learning and development of literacy and Gàidhlig. In most cases observed, staff provided most children and young people with activities which were appropriately challenging.

Where available, Gaelic-speaking language assistants provided effective support for learners. This worked well when the support was planned along with teachers. We found that this helped teachers plan learning for multi-stage classes.

Across sectors, there remains much scope to improve the support provided for learners with additional support needs. We found that many secondary schools were using personal support time to have regular conversations with young people about their learning and progress. These conversations now need to be specific to young people learning Gaelic, and undertaken in Gaelic.

In early learning and childcare settings, we have identified that children need to experience more of the curriculum through Gaelic in order to better meet their learning needs.

Inspectors found that in primary schools, most staff used Curriculum for Excellence well to plan learning experiences which were broad and balanced. However, they noted that improvements are required in secondary schools to ensure personalised learning pathways for young people in GME. Staff need to make better use of digital technology, partnerships with the local community and businesses and colleges to support delivery of some of the curriculum through Gaelic.

Across sectors, inspectors identified the need for a wider range of resources to support GME. These resources need to keep abreast of developments in the curriculum, digital technology and new programmes such as those focusing on raising attainment.

Inspectors have observed staff making good use of advice within, [Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach to Languages](#) to increase the uptake of Gaelic (Learners) across the primary stages. However, they noted a reduction in the numbers of young people studying Gaelic (Learners) and Gàidhlig in the senior phase. It is important to ensure that young people can continue learning Gaelic into and throughout the senior phase. This would support more young people to undertake National Qualifications through the medium of Gaelic.

How well do schools improve the quality of their work?

We found that staff have responded well to career-long professional learning opportunities which are specifically focused on leadership in GME. However, there is scope for providers to make more use of national advice on Gaelic, for example when developing their vision. Schools often need to make better use of self-evaluation approaches to identify priorities which will lead to improvements to the quality of GME. They should continue to ensure that families are meaningfully involved in supporting improvement activities. It is also important that the benefits of bilingualism, as accrued through GME, are promoted with families.

Within GME early learning and childcare settings there is a need to provide appropriate professional learning to ensure staff are well prepared to respond to the forthcoming expansion of hours for early learning and childcare.

