

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to define a catchment area for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar and to formalise the current arrangements relating to Gaelic Medium Education (GME) in related secondary schools.**

**The new GME catchment for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar will overlay the current catchments of Banavie Primary School, Caol Primary School, Inverlochry Primary School, Lundavra Primary School, Roy Bridge Primary School, Spean Bridge Primary School and St Bride's Primary School.**

**The catchment area for Lochaber High School will apply to both GME and English Medium Education, and under which pupils from the St Bride's Primary School catchment (part of the Kinlochleven associated school group) will have the right to attend Lochaber High School to access GME, provided they have previously attended Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar.**

## **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 The Highland Council's proposal to define catchment areas for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar and to formalise the current arrangements for GME in related secondary schools. 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 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:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 27 February 2018 in connection with the council's proposals;
- 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;
- meetings to consult stakeholders in each of the associated school groups referenced in the proposal and where related written communication had been received. These meetings were held at Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar, Kinlochleven High School and Ardnamurchan High School; and
- individual discussions as HM Inspectors considered appropriate.

## **2. Consultation Process**

2.1 The Highland 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 29 January 2018 to 16 March 2018. During that time, the council held a public meeting at Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar. The meeting was attended by two people. 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. Other Gaelic organisations were also advised. 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. Ten written responses were received. These included a response from Bòrd na Gàidhlig in which they supported the proposal to establish catchment areas for GME. Overall, the other responses raised a few reasonable concerns. On the council's request, the headteacher at Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar undertook a consultation with children. Overall, children supported the council's proposal to establish catchment areas for GME, with a few concerns expressed.

## **3. Educational Aspects of Proposal**

3.1 The Highland Council's proposal is responding to legislation which requires catchment areas to be established for GME provisions. The council is taking forward a duty to support and promote GME. While most stakeholders generally support the overarching proposal, there is potential to increase some stakeholders' confidence in

aspects of the proposal. In finalising its report, the council should clarify how they will take forward some reasonable concerns. These concerns are outlined below.

3.2 The stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors spoke very positively of their commitment to Gaelic Education. They identified that the Gaelic language is an important feature of the wider Lochaber area. As such, a few stakeholders felt that the consultation should have simultaneously covered the whole of the Lochaber area. This, they felt, would have resulted in a more holistic overview of GME across Lochaber. A number of stakeholders were not convinced of the need to establish catchment areas for GME. Other stakeholders did not feel it necessary to define catchment areas so that access to GME remained open to all. In the final report, the council's statement on educational benefits needs to articulate the detail of how meeting this legislative requirement will benefit GME across the Lochaber area.

3.3 Stakeholders raised some concerns which related to strategic planning for the sustainability of GME. This included clarity and, in some cases, raising an awareness of the council's criteria for providing transport to GME provisions. A few stakeholders felt that the criteria set as a reasonable travelling distance to be educated in GME was too restrictive. Others asked for more detail of how the council would meet the commitments they make in the proposal paper to, under the terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, meet demands for setting up new GME provisions. This was especially so given the recognised national issues in recruiting teachers of GME. The final version of the report should clarify these matters.

3.4 Some stakeholders identified potential issues of equity and equality should the proposal go ahead. This is as only some of the primary schools in Kinlochleven High School's and Lochaber High School's associated groups are being named as part of the catchment area for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar. The council feels that they have identified schools for which travel is reasonable and attractive to parents, as required of them in the statutory Guidance. There was a strong view that all of Kinlochleven High School's associated school group should be included in the GME catchment area and not just, as stated, St Bride's Primary School. However, a few were concerned that this may have an adverse impact on the future roll of Kinlochleven High School. In the case of Ballachulish Primary School, stakeholders report that a few parents are interested in accessing GME for their children. This interest, they feel, would best be met through attendance at Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar rather than the possible setting up of a GME provision as part of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. The council needs to be clear that projections of parental interest in GME are underpinning their final decision on defining the catchment area for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar. They should also ensure that they are putting in place arrangements which can satisfy future demand for GME.

3.5 There was strong opposition to any proposal that may result in potential pupils for Ardgour Primary School being educated in GME outwith the catchment area for Ardnamurchan High School associated school group. In its final report, the council should restate that their proposal does not include the English medium catchment area of Ardgour Primary School in the catchment area of Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar.

#### **4. Summary**

The Highland Council is taking forward a duty to support and promote GME by establishing a catchment area for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar. They are also formalising current arrangements in related secondary schools. In finalising its report, the council needs to continue to engage with stakeholders to clarify aspects of the proposal and to address concerns. They should explain further how their principles for 'reasonable distance' promote entitlement to GME. Particularly, in respect of schools in current catchment areas that are not included in the proposed GME catchment. Stakeholders feel that these schools are nearby and that children could be missing out. The council's statement should promote more confidence in how they will meet new future demands for GME that are outwith the proposed catchment for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Loch Abar.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
April 2018**