

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeen City Council to establish a catchment area for the existing Gaelic Medium Education provision at Hazlehead Academy, which is bounded by Aberdeen City's local authority boundary;

and

to establish a catchment area for the existing Gaelic Medium Education provision at Gilcomstoun School, which is bounded by Aberdeen City's local authority boundary;

and

that the new catchment areas should take effect from 1 August 2023.

March 2023

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His 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 Aberdeen City Council's proposal to set city-wide school catchment zones for Gaelic Medium Education at Gilcomstoun School and Hazlehead Academy. 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.

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 8 February 2023 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; and
- discussions with relevant consultees at Gilcomstoun School and Hazlehead Academy and consideration of further representations made directly to HM Inspectors on relevant educational aspects of the proposal.

2. Consultation process

2.1 Aberdeen City Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#). The proposal paper was distributed to a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties. The council hosted a public meeting at which they outlined key elements of the proposal. A very small number of people attended. They did not have any concerns about the proposal. Aberdeenshire Council make placing requests to send children and young people to Aberdeen City Council to be educated through the medium of Gaelic. Their response highlighted that the provisions for learners in Aberdeenshire Council would remain the same.

2.2 Overall those who responded to the consultation supported the proposed catchment areas, but with some further clarifications on issues such as transport. Interested parties were afforded a dedicated area of Aberdeen City Council's website for information and an opportunity to respond

to the statutory consultation. This attracted 19 responses, with a small number responding by electronic mail. Almost all of the respondents were in support of the catchment areas. A small number of respondents misunderstood the purpose of the consultation and made discriminatory comments on Gaelic.

2.3 Bòrd na Gàidhlig, as statutory consultee, and Comann nam Pàrant welcome the proposal for a city-wide catchment area for both Hazlehead Academy and Gilcomstoun School. Comann nam Pàrant highlight the resulting educational benefits for children in Aberdeen City Council, as well as families in Aberdeenshire Council. Bòrd na Gàidhlig highlight that the Statutory Guidance for Gaelic Education, 2017 specifies that education authorities may wish to consider demand for Gaelic Medium Education when setting guidelines for placing pupils in Gaelic Medium Education provision. Bòrd na Gàidhlig do not expand further to consider impact on this particular proposal.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors elicited a range of stakeholders' views on the educational benefits of Aberdeen City Council's proposals for a city-wide catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education. All stakeholders agree that the council's proposals are of educational benefits but that more clarity is needed on transport arrangements and future placings. Stakeholders considered the proposal to be inclusive in that all children and young people would have access to Gaelic Medium Education, if they wish. This, they felt, has potential to grow the numbers studying Gaelic Medium Education. Stakeholders also hoped the proposal would improve children's continuation with Gaelic Medium Education between primary and secondary schools. Stakeholders welcomed that free transport would be provided. However, they sought clarity on how this would be realised to reduce long travel times for children and young people. Some children and young people currently have to use more than one transport connection to get to the schools with Gaelic Medium Education. Stakeholders also sought details of how children and young people would be kept safe when travelling to school. They sought reassurances that the provision of free transport would be sustained. This was based on stakeholders' previous experiences of free transport being removed for Gaelic Medium Education.

3.2 Stakeholders felt that the educational benefits would be enhanced further if the council had a better strategy for recruiting and retaining teachers of Gaelic Medium Education. Longer term, stakeholders requested that there would be no limits on the number of children and young people learning in Gaelic Medium Education across 3-18 provisions. In this respect, they sought further clarify on section five of the proposal paper.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors have evidenced that the council has support for their proposal, with a few clarifications. Stakeholders are committed to making Gaelic Medium Education as accessible as possible. The council should clarify a few points highlighted in section three of this report. They should specify the arrangements for free transport and how this will be sustained long term, particularly in times of financial constraints. Children and young people's safety on transport should also be detailed. The council should also consider the further use of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017 in respect of guidelines for placement requests and enrolments. This would assist in clarifying a few stakeholders' queries.

HM Inspectors
March 2023