

Gaelic Medium catchment areas for Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis, Dingwall Primary School, Millbank Primary School, Nairn; Inverness Royal Academy, Dingwall Academy, and Nairn Academy

Comann nam Pàrant (Nàiseanta) (CnP) welcomes the formalisation of school catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education (GME) in Inverness, Dingwall and Nairn areas.

CnP appreciate the complexities around these catchments due to the geography of the area and the tendency of people to gravitate towards Inverness for work or access to amenities.

Bun-sgoil Gàidhlig Inbhir Nis and Inverness Royal Academy

Whilst we are in general agreement with the proposed catchment, there are, as noted in the consultation document, a number of children who currently attend BSGI from outwith the proposed catchment. We welcome the re-assurance that these children, along with their siblings in the future, will continue to be supported with transport. We are aware that there may be an issue with capacity in the future at BSGI as GME continues to grow and parents should also be given re-assurance that any future placing requests for siblings of pupils currently attending the schools will be successful. We also note from the consultation document that a number of pupils attend BSGI from the “Nairnside / Croy” area and we are aware that there has been discussion as part of the Nairn consultation on including Croy and Ardersier in the Nairn catchment rather than for BSGI. Whilst we appreciate that this may have potential to improve numbers in Nairn, we believe that BSGI as a stand-alone Gaelic school is a more attractive option for parents and that making this change could have a negative impact on uptake of GME from these areas.

It is difficult to fully comment on the proposal to include Avoch and North Kessock in the BSGI catchment with Tore and Munlochry in the Dingwall catchment without more evidence on which would be the more attractive option for parents. That said, as there are currently pupils attending BSGI from Munlochry, it would seem to indicate that families would be more inclined to travel to Inverness for GME. It is also worth noting that Inverness has the more attractive option for parents with a dedicated Gaelic school compared to provision in Dingwall which is provided in a mainly English medium environment. Educationally the total immersive experience provided in a Gaelic school has benefits and we feel this should be taken into account and consideration given to including Tore and Munlochry in the BSGI catchment as well as Avoch and North Kessock. GME provision at Inverness Royal Academy also offers a wider GME experience for pupils.

Dingwall Primary School and Dingwall Academy

Again, we are in general agreement with the proposed catchment, apart from the inclusion of Tore and Munlochry (see previous comment). However, given some of the distances involved and travelling times, particularly from the Fortrose ASG we hope that there will be opportunities in the future to have other GME provision within the area.

There is also potential to further develop the current provision in Dingwall. Highland Council have in the past considered establishing a dedicated Gaelic school in Dingwall and we would support this as the next logical step for GME in this area. We are also aware that there are currently some issues with pre-school provision, and we hope this situation will be speedily rectified before it has too much of a detrimental effect on enrolment for GME.

Millbank Primary School and Nairn Academy

CnP agree with this catchment. Although it is a small catchment area there is potential for growth in GME from pre-school through to secondary. We note the current restrictions in numbers in Croileagan, which is a partner service nursery run by an English medium organisation, and this situation should be reviewed by the council with a view to establishing council run Gaelic medium early learning and childcare provision. This would allow numbers to increase and lead to an increase in enrolment for primary provision.

We also note parental concerns around secondary provision at Nairn Academy. We welcomed the fairly recent introduction of Gaelic provision at the Academy which allows Gaelic medium pupils to continue with Gaelic in their local school, remain with their peer group from primary and participate in after-school activities. Given the level of concern from parents we hope that the council will continue to support Nairn Academy to expand provision for GME. There are also examples of good practice from a number of schools who although they have limited subject teaching in Gaelic maximise the opportunities that pupils have to develop their Gaelic language skills through participation in projects and activities such as the national debate. We would also encourage Highland Council to consider opportunities for more collaboration with other schools such as Inverness Royal Academy, and involvement in community activities such as are provided through Comunn na Gàidhlig.

Transport

We note the proposal, for all catchments, that the default position will be for the council to utilise current secondary school transport for all provision. We are concerned that this may not always be appropriate for very young children and would remind the council that any proposal should have the potential to attract parents to choose GME for their children. Transport should not be a barrier to accessing GME.

Promotion and Information

The council hopes that setting the catchment areas will provide clarification for parents on their entitlement to GME and this is welcome. We hope that the council will ensure that all parents in the associated schools are made aware prior to enrolment for primary education that they do have an opportunity, supported by the council, to access GME.

We would also expect the council to continue to promote the opportunity for parents to submit a request for GMPE in line with the Education Act (Scotland) 2016.

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