

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann)

Sustainable GME Development

March 2017

Introduction

Comann nam Pàrant is a constituted voluntary organisation which represents parents and carers with children in all stages of Gaelic-medium education (GME). Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann) (CnPDE) is part of a network of local parent groups, which are represented on a national committee – CnP Naiseanta.

Much of GME development over the years has been parent-led and parents provide a significant amount of expertise about the issues facing GME. The issue we currently face is how to ensure that all children in GME receive their entitlement to an immersion education, become fluent speakers of Gaelic, and meet educational attainment goals, while continuing to ensure GME remains an option for all families who wish their children to be educated through Gaelic.

GME is central to the National Gaelic Language Plan (National GLP), both in its current version and within the proposed plan for 2017-22 (currently in the process of public consultation). GME is a prioritised area of the National GLP and will make a crucial contribution to meeting outcomes relating to increasing the number of fluent speakers. References to the National GLP below are to the consultation draft 2017-22.

Although GME to date has been a great success story, a shortage of qualified fluent staff presents the risk that in future GME will not deliver the outcome of an increased number of fluent Gaelic speakers. Primary GME children are being removed from Gaelic immersion for periods of time to be taught by English-medium class teachers, a situation which results in reduced fluency and failure to meet the goal of equal confidence in English and Gaelic. If there is a continuation of the current staff shortages, there is a risk that local authorities may have no choice but to restrict the number of children entering GME.

It is necessary for an urgent renewed emphasis on workforce planning to ensure that immersion can be properly resourced and sustained for children currently in GME and for rapidly growing intakes.

1. Summary

The provision of GME has to date been reactive to demand from families and has been dependent on the motivation of individual local authorities. Estates management issues have in many cases determined the direction of GME development over the years.

CnPDE has consistently supported the introduction of a statutory entitlement for parents who wish to have their children educated through the medium of Gaelic. We view as a

positive step forward the recent production of *Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education* (further discussed below).

There is now an urgent requirement for a discussion to take place about the quality of the delivery of GME, and in particular a discussion about workforce planning. We need to move away from a reactive approach towards a proactive plan to have a trained workforce in place that can ensure that **all** children in GME receive their entitlement to an immersion education.

GME development must continue, but in a sustainable manner that meets national outcomes and provides immersion in line with educational best practice.

Sustainable development should ensure:

- That GME will produce fluent Gaelic speakers.
- That all children in GME will benefit from the educational best practice of immersion.
- That workforce is in place to deliver best practice.
- That teachers are able to work in a more rewarding immersion environment.
- That there is efficient usage of both local authority and Scottish Government resource.

All avenues around workforce planning should be explored before there is consideration of limiting entry to GME. Any proposal to limit entry must be temporary, and included only as part of a strategy to ensure an immersion education for all GME children and a plan to make GME available to all children in future years.

Local authorities have a significant level of responsibility to ensure the delivery of GME in line with best practice, but leadership at national level is also crucial as the GME workforce is a national resource.

These issues are discussed in more detail below.

2. GME outcomes

GME is based on the principles of immersion. The curriculum delivered is Curriculum for Excellence and covers the same subjects as in English-medium education (EME) local authority schools. By delivering the curriculum through the medium of Gaelic, children in GME should end up equally confident in the use of both Gaelic and English.

Equal confidence in the use of both languages is most effectively achieved where immersion is delivered through formal education and supported in the home from the ages of 0-18. For the purposes of this discussion we will focus mainly on primary school GME.

Discussion of best practice draws significantly from two documents:

1. The document produced by Bòrd na Gàidhlig dated February 2017: *Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education* ("Statutory Guidance").

2. The document produced by Education Scotland / Foghlam Alba dated February 2015: *Advice on Gaelic Education* (“Advice”).

The Statutory Guidance has been prepared under Section 9 of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, as amended by the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, and states that: *Relevant public authorities must have regard to this Guidance where their functions relate to Gaelic education or the provision of Gaelic education. (Statutory Guidance, Introduction).*

It is important for local authorities to recognise that the guidance is **statutory**, and that they are **required** to have regard to it in the delivery of GME.

The National GLP includes as an aim: *We will ensure that the Guidance on Gaelic Education is promoted, widely used and is the recognised authority on Gaelic education. (National GLP p22).*

The Advice sets out Gaelic Education policy (Advice, 3.1-3.6) which includes references to Curriculum for Excellence and Language Learning in Scotland, and is an important best practice document which is used by school inspectors and other key stakeholders. It is implicit that parents expect their children in GME to achieve the best they are able academically and to become confident and contributing members of society.

It is however also important to recognise that GME has a part to play in the national policy of supporting and developing the Gaelic language. *The Scottish Government recognises that the only way to create a secure future for Gaelic in Scotland will be by increasing the numbers of those learning, speaking and using the language, and Gaelic Education in particular has a key role in achieving this aim. (Advice 3.6).*

GME therefore has the additional responsibility of producing fluent and confident speakers of Gaelic. The production of a National GLP every five years by Bòrd na Gàidhlig is required by the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. The consultation draft of the National GLP 2017-22 includes GME as a priority area in the contribution towards reaching the core aims of increasing the learning and usage of Gaelic.

When looked at from the perspective of educational best practice and delivering national outcomes in relation to the Gaelic language, GME development must ensure that children in GME are educated in line with GME best practice as set out in the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, and the successful delivery of outcomes as set out in the National GLP 2017-22.

Local authorities must give regard to this when planning the resource for GME intakes and when projecting future intakes.

3. GME best practice

The principle of immersion learning at GME primary level is supported in the Statutory Guidance 2.10-2.13.

Discussing the time that children spend learning in schools, the Advice states: *During this time they have an entitlement to receive high quality experiences as part of Gaelic Medium*

*Education. Central to this experience is children's and young people's learning in Gaelic Medium Education being based on the **principles of language immersion**. (Advice 4.4).*

During the early years and primary phase of GME, this is divided into two phases:

1. "Total immersion" – learning exclusively through the medium of Gaelic other than in exceptional circumstances.
2. "Immersion phase" – beginning in primary 3 or 4, transferring Gaelic language skills to reading and writing in the English language. During this phase, the curriculum in its entirety should continue to be taught through the medium of Gaelic.

3.1. Immersion

The Advice is clear that:

*Total immersion leads to total fluency. **Alternative models lead to the dilution of fluency and are as such non-compatible with the development of strong and sustained Gaelic Medium Education.** ... There needs to be a clear understanding that bilingualism is an outcome of Gaelic Medium Education and not a learning and teaching approach. ... There is a substantial and convincing body of evidence from inspection that partial immersion is not effective in developing fluency. (Advice 4.7).*

It is very important to recognise that the introduction of English literacy during the immersion phase (from primary 3 or primary 4 onwards) should not change the level of immersion. *In best practice, in the immersion phase **teachers lead learning in all curriculum areas, including the newly introduced English, through the medium of Gaelic.** (Advice 8.3).*

And from the Statutory Guidance: *From P4-P7, English language and literacy outcomes should be introduced through the medium of Gaelic. In order for pupils to maintain and develop Gaelic fluency and make progress with the language, it is recommended that schools should aim for all aspects of the curriculum to be delivered through the medium of Gaelic. (Statutory Guidance 2.12).*

In best practice, staff cover for non-contact time and all support staff should be confident and fluent Gaelic speakers.

Children should not be removed from immersion for a period of time, such as spending a primary school year with a non Gaelic-speaking teacher. GME requires a continuous development of language skills and vocabulary across all areas of the curriculum in order to achieve the outcome of equal confidence in both languages. This continuous development can only take place successfully if the principles of immersion are followed consistently.

Given the principles of immersion, it is a very basic entitlement of children in GME that they all have a class teacher who is a fluent Gaelic speaker. The entitlement of children in GME to an immersion education is a continuing entitlement throughout the whole of primary school.

A priority for Scottish Government and local authorities should be to plan resources to support projected numbers.

3.2. Additional Support Needs

As in EME, children educated through GME will often require access to additional support in their learning.

Education authorities should demonstrate through their workforce planning that they are considering how additional support is provided to children and young people in GME. (Statutory Guidance 2.34).

There is recognition that it can be challenging to provide some support through the medium of Gaelic, however: *The aims and goals of Curriculum for Excellence and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 place a **responsibility on all staff to meet the needs of all learners.** (Advice 14.4).* We consider that this does include the delivery of additional support for learning in the language through which children are being educated.

The provision of additional support for learning through the medium of Gaelic may require additional funding at national level. Local authorities may require financial support to be able to deliver adequate support for learning in GME schools and units.

4. Challenges to the delivery of GME best practice

The key challenge to be overcome in the delivery of GME best practice is the availability of GME staff.

In offering GME and admitting children to GME schools and units, local authorities need to be clear that they are committing to the delivery of a consistent immersion experience for all children in the GME school or unit.

The Statutory Guidance emphasises that education authorities which provide GME have a duty to support GME. *The duty of support requires an education authority to take reasonable steps to ensure that teachers in any class providing GME or GLE have such resources, training and opportunities as are reasonably necessary to provide that education adequately and effectively. It is recommended that this should include providing teaching staff in GME with adequate support to ensure that their fluency levels are up to the standard required to maintain immersion. (Statutory Guidance 1.69).*

The Statutory Guidance also requires education authorities to consider that it may be appropriate for GME class sizes to be smaller than those set as the national maximum, or the local authority's standard ratio, stating that, *there are particular requirements placed on the GME teacher whose aim is to develop and maintain fluency in Gaelic in the early stages of primary education. (Statutory Guidance 2.49).*

Local authorities which provide GME are as an absolute minimum making the commitment to provide each child with a GME class teacher for the duration of their primary schooling, and access to Gaelic learning support when required.

In order to provide a fully comprehensive and effective GME experience, class teachers should be supported by Gaelic-speaking classroom assistants and support and administrative staff. Where composite classing structures exist, children in the total immersion phase (P1-P3) should ideally be educated separately from children in the immersion phase.

4.1. National leadership

CnPDE has previously suggested that a national approach should be taken towards GME staff recruitment, training, allocation and retention. We recognise that teacher recruitment and retention is not an issue that affects only GME, and we recognise that local authorities are responsible for employment and recruitment of education staff in their own areas.

However, we continue to believe that GME staffing issues require national level leadership for the following reasons:

- GME plays an important role in meeting national goals relating to Gaelic language revitalisation. These outcomes will only be achievable if the principles of immersion are followed.
- The infrastructure of GME schools is supported by the Scottish Government through the Gaelic Schools Capital Fund, and annual revenue costs are supported through the Specific Grants Scheme. These funds are a national resource and it is important that they are used to support GME and the revitalisation of Gaelic. Where GME immersion principles are not followed, it could be argued that the funds are not being used for their correct purpose.
- There is currently a lack of transparency about the national number of GME staff and the national number of GME pupils. A better understanding of these numbers and how they are projected to change on a national basis would help to inform strategic decisions about the timing of planning and investing in new Gaelic schools.
- National level leadership could assist with the sharing of resources and ideas to address similar issues which occur in different local authorities.

Some resources do currently exist at national level to support education authorities in the recruitment and retention of GME staff. For example, the Statutory Guidance suggests that: *Education authorities ... should consider a survey of the teaching workforce to identify the level of interest and ability in Gaelic, and to see if there are any teachers who would like to consider transferring from English medium education to GME. A template for this purpose is available from Bòrd na Gàidhlig. (Statutory Guidance 2.65).*

Teaching staff who wish to transfer from EME to GME can be supported through existing programmes such as STREAP and Gift. Advanced learners will have different needs from teachers already fluent in Gaelic who have made the decision to work within EME schools. These groups will require different levels of support to encourage them into GME.

Workforce planning for GME should be factored into Scottish Government's annual teacher workforce planning which takes place each autumn: *to estimate how many student teachers*

should be enrolled by the relevant universities in the following year to ensure that we maintain an adequate supply of teachers to meet local authorities' and schools' requirements. (<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/Teaching/Staffing>).

A more strategic approach is needed to ensure that universities offer appropriate courses and maintain continuity of staffing. "Relevant universities" should refer to all universities offering teacher education programmes, and all of these course providers should be required to demonstrate how they are contributing to the national requirement for a significantly higher number of GME teachers.

Although secondary GME is not covered in detail in this paper, strategic workforce planning is also crucial at the secondary stage to ensure continuity of the immersion experience, the maintenance of fluency, and continuity of subject delivery. Initiatives such as the e-sgoil should be supported as a valuable additional resource for teachers working in secondary GME.

Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig must demonstrate that they are working together with universities to plan for future national workforce requirements.

4.2. Strategic planning for GME

The City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) is currently leading a process of producing a strategic plan for the future of GME in Edinburgh, which will be included in its Gaelic Language Plan (GLP) 2017-22.

Councillors, council officials, GME parents and members of Edinburgh's Gaelic community are involved in this process.

Glasgow City Council is about to begin a formal consultation on a third site for GME in Glasgow with the aim of increasing the physical space available for GME in the city. Engagement events have been organised and views collected from parents to inform this process.

Given that the two largest population centres are involved in strategic planning for the future of GME, we have a need for current and transparent information about the numbers of GME staff and pupils.

Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig could take simple steps to support this by:

1. Conducting an immediate census of all education authorities to determine:
 - As of a set date this academic year:
 - GME primary pupils numbers
 - FTE GME primary teacher requirement
 - FTE GME primary teachers employed
 - FTE GME primary teacher vacancies
 - FTE GME primary teacher roles currently filled with EME teacher

- 2017 - 18
 - Projected primary pupil numbers
 - Projected FTE GME primary teachers requirement
 - What is the Gaelic learning support provision in each school in terms of staffing hours?
2. Supporting all education authorities in carrying out a survey of their current teaching workforce to determine Gaelic speaking teaching staff working in EME and whether any could be supported to transition to GME.

A transparent comparison of the number of staff and the number of staff vacancies in GME would help to inform a discussion about whether it is feasible to meet the projected demand for GME from families.

If new GME infrastructure and annual revenue budgets are to be supported by Scottish Government, it needs to be clear that it is possible for GME to be delivered in these schools in line with best practice and national policy goals. This will only be possible if sufficient GME staff exist or will exist to deliver GME in line with the principles of immersion.

5. Sustainable development – Impact on GME primary places

Parents and others have for many years campaigned to keep GME open to all children and CnPDE continues to believe that this is best and most equitable approach, and necessary for the expansion in the numbers of Gaelic speakers required to meet national outcomes.

However, GME must conform to the standards of best practice and achieve the outcome of providing children with fluency in the language via immersion and the use of Gaelic as the main classroom language. Without better workforce planning, this may result in some families being denied access to GME in certain years.

Where there has been inadequate planning and there are a limited number of Gaelic-speaking teachers, the total immersion phase of primary is prioritised (P1-3). If the number of pupils in these year groups were to be particularly high in any one school or unit, there is the danger that children in the immersion phase (from P4 onwards) will be allocated a non Gaelic-speaking teacher for a year or longer. As discussed above, this is not in line with best practice, does not constitute the proper delivery of GME, damages fluency, and does not support the revitalisation of the Gaelic language in line with national goals.

5.1. Entry criteria for GME

CnPDE continues to believe that GME should be open to all families who wish it for their children, and that adequate planning should be in place to resource the entitlement to continuing immersion in primary school.

Without adequate planning and resource, local authorities may have to take the unwelcome step of considering imposing a temporary limit on the number of children entering GME, and may have to consider implementing entry criteria.

We consider that there are many difficulties with entry criteria, and a real risk that criteria could discriminate against certain demographics. However, workforce planning to date at both national and local levels has not proven adequate to meet the current demand for GME, and therefore it may be necessary to discuss temporary entry criteria.

It is recognised that individual local authorities are responsible for the placement of children in their own school estate. It could however be useful to establish a nationally consistent approach towards entry criteria. Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig may wish to lead discussions with local authorities about the establishment of entry criteria which best support the delivery of GME best practice and outcomes surrounding Gaelic language revitalisation, if the situation should arise that staffing does not allow provision of GME to all who wish it. If this situation were to arise, it would be important that local authorities formed a proper policy specifically for GME, and did not simply apply standard EME policies which would not be appropriate for GME.

It remains the position of CnPDE that GME should be open to all, and that adequate resourcing and advance planning should be put in place to avoid even temporary restrictions on numbers.

6. Conclusion

CnPDE, along with other GME parent groups in Scotland, fully supports the continued development of GME. We would like to see open access to GME for every family who wishes to have their children educated through Gaelic, and expect forward planning and resource management to be put in place to enable this.

GME sustainable development must ensure that **children in GME are educated in line with GME best practice as set out in the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, and the successful delivery of outcomes as set out in the National GLP 2017-22.**

It must be ensured that all pupils in GME receive their continuing entitlement to a Gaelic immersion education. Consistent immersion is the only method through which pupils in GME will become fluent and confident speakers of Gaelic, and the only method through which we will meet the national attainment levels and policy goals aimed at revitalising Gaelic in Scotland. It remains our aspiration that immersion GME should be available to all families who request it.

We consider that local authorities responsible for delivering GME need to recognise their responsibilities for properly resourcing immersion GME schools and units at sustainable levels, but that this is also a national issue and one that will require national level leadership by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Scottish Government.