

Councillor Marilynne Maclaren  
City Chambers  
High Street  
Edinburgh  
EH1 1YJ

12 November 2010

Dear Councillor Maclaren,

I am writing to you on behalf of Comann nam Pàrant (CnP), the representative body for parents with children in Gaelic Medium Education (GME).

The City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) has options under discussion for the development of GME in Edinburgh. These options are detailed in a paper of 7<sup>th</sup> September 2010: *Gaelic Medium Education: Outcome of Discussions with the Scottish Government and Options for Development* (the revised CEC report). This report will be discussed at a meeting of the full Council on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2010.

Parents believe that any changes to the provision of GME should take full account of:

- The requirements of government policy for Gaelic development:
  - The **national policy framework** for Gaelic and the critical importance of GME development.
  - The support and survival requirements of **Gaelic as a highly-vulnerable minority language**.
- The **educational needs** of GME pupils.
- The need for a long term **strategy** for GME development in our city.
- The **accurate** costs of providing such a high standard of education, which is open to all.

### **Primary GME**

It is the view of parents that GME at pre-school and primary levels would be best secured and developed with the establishment of a **dedicated GME primary school**. Our views of the pre-school and primary level options are set out in detail in our papers:

[Response to the City of Edinburgh Council revised proposals to develop GME in Edinburgh](#)

Dated 12 November 2010

and

[The Development of Gaelic Medium Education in Edinburgh: Financial Implications](#)

Dated 12 November 2010

We trust you will take the time to read these carefully.

We also attach an independently prepared [Review of Data Presented for Options Appraisal](#), commissioned by CnP, which reviews the data presented in the revised CEC report, and CnP's response to the proposals.

## Secondary GME

The revised CEC report proposes that GME secondary education is moved from James Gillespie's High School to Tynecastle High School.

CnP believes that such a move would be **detrimental to GME pupils**, and to the growth of GME, and requests that **changes to secondary provision of GME be removed** from the options paper, for the following reasons:

Educational reasons:

- There has been over a decade of investment in **curriculum and timetable development** at James Gillespie's High School (JGHS). Securing integrated provision across a range of subjects at secondary level is complex to achieve. After years of work, GME at secondary is finally reaching a point where genuine Gaelic medium provision across a number of subjects (i.e. teaching various subjects through the medium of Gaelic, rather than simply teaching Gaelic as a subject) is becoming a realistic proposition.
- Bòrd na Gàidhlig consulted last year with local authorities on the need for a Gaelic medium secondary curriculum and most were supportive of the principle of a core curriculum of **five Gaelic medium subjects** being offered as a minimum. This could best be delivered in Edinburgh through building on the increased provision at JGHS, rather than starting again at another site.
- There have been many periods of difficulty at JGHS in reaching the stage we have now, and **to begin again at a new school would be detrimental to all pupils in GME** at secondary level. At this crucial stage of GME secondary development, it is key to build on what has already been achieved at JGHS. This is a view shared by the Head Teacher at JGHS.
- With the continuation of stable GME provision at one location, JGHS could be in a position to deliver four to five subjects in Gaelic within a year – meeting **HMIE targets** for GME secondary provision. This will not be achieved if provision is split over two sites.
- The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 requires that any proposed move must not be detrimental to the children. For the reasons above, it is the view of CnP that the proposed move would be **highly detrimental to GME children**, and CnP would argue this in the strongest possible terms in any such consultation.

Financial reasons:

- The revised CEC report proposes that “pupils in James Gillespie's would continue to receive Gaelic language classes, pupils moving from Tollcross GME unit's P7 into secondary school would be offered places at a new Gaelic unit in Tynecastle High School.”(revised report 3.51). The paper does not specify additional financial resource to support the **duplication of educational services** at two sites, resource which will be required if the current standards of educational delivery are to be maintained. At this time of financial constraint, this is additional and quite unnecessary expense for CEC.
- The **GLPS scheme** operates in the JGHS cluster of schools. As this programme develops further, a Gaelic teacher will be required at JGHS to meet the needs of non-fluent Gaelic

learners who wish to study the language at secondary level. Again, the provision of Gaelic teachers at two separate sites would result in a **costly duplication of resources**.

- The GLPS scheme has been introduced and developed within the JGHS cluster primaries at considerable cost over a period of around five years, with training and recruitment of staff, providing resources etc. If Gaelic is no longer offered at JGHS this investment would be wasted, and would in addition require this investment to be repeated at the cluster schools for any new secondary school.
- CEC receives significant support from the Scottish Government to assist with the provision of GME. This support is in place **to assist with the development and expansion of GME** and in practice helps offset costs which are (or were) in excess of equivalent mainstream English-medium costs – for example transport. This funding is considered **development funding**. Were CEC to proceed with an option that is clearly detrimental to Gaelic development, **it is likely to become ineligible for this funding**, which will instead go to local authorities that are supportive of development. CEC would still be required to provide GME, but without access to current levels of development funding.

Gaelic development reasons:

- If CEC were to proceed with the proposed changes to secondary provision with their resultant **anticipated educational issues**, this would be likely to have an impact on the future demand for GME. With Bòrd na Gàidhlig growth targets of a 15% increase in children entering GME per annum, and ambitious national targets for increasing the number of Gaelic speakers, CEC should not propose any such change without specifically quantifying the impact on demand that may be caused by the development proposals. Given that no capacity issues are anticipated at JGHS for at least eight more years, it seems clear that the current healthy growth rates would be best maintained by continuing to develop GME secondary delivery at this site.

Legal reasons:

- The Gaelic Act (2005) seeks to ensure that Gaelic is accorded “equal respect” to English. Specific Bòrd na Gàidhlig guidance on this states that public bodies should “be supportive and generous to Gaelic development”. While CEC may have concerns over possible capacity issues at a fairly distant future date, the presumption that GME children should be the ones who are required to move and lose all the educational investment as described above, **does not demonstrate equal respect for Gaelic**. CEC’s capacity concern is further discussed below.

**Capacity at James Gillespie’s:**

The main argument provided by CEC for suggesting that GME should move out of JGHS is based on an assumption that there will be insufficient capacity for both GME and catchment pupils, **in around eight years time**. Given the extremely strong educational, financial, Gaelic developmental and legal case for retaining and developing GME within JGHS as outlined above, CnP believes that **it is extremely premature to propose a move based on such distant projections**, which may or may not prove to be accurate.

It is possible that the same over capacity scenario could arise at Tynecastle High School in future years should GME be relocated there. **It is unjust and disrespectful for pupils in GME to be placed**

**in this position of instability and uncertainty.** No other group of pupils in the city is discriminated against in this way.

CnP believes that the projections are likely to be inaccurate for the following reasons:

1. The estimates are based on 2001 census data obtained from GROS (General Register Office for Scotland). However, such data is known to contain inaccuracies, and GROS provides the following caveat on the accuracy of its data:

*“The sample size for Scotland for the IPS is small, so estimates derived from this survey are subject to large sampling and non-sampling errors. General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) is conducting an on-going exercise to improve the quality of data zone population estimates. Areas where estimates are less reliable tend to be those with high levels of migration - for example, student areas.”*

*(Source: <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files2/stats/small-area-population-estimates/sape-2009-about.pdf>)*

2. Demand for places at a given school depends not only on pure population figures, but also on demand for that school relative to other neighbouring schools. This issue appears not to have been considered in the projections about what demand for JGHS may be in eight years' time, when the situation and demand for other schools may be substantially different from now.

3. Capacity and over-capacity within a school is not an absolute number, but depends on a complex series of factors, including the spread of pupils across different year groups and timetabling issues. These cannot be predicted eight years in advance. It should be noted that in many respects, a coherent year group of GME pupils is easier to manage and plan for than general increases across the board.

4. The number of pupils staying on for fifth and/or sixth year cannot be accurately predicted, and may be substantially different from current high levels, depending on, amongst others factors, employment opportunities and changes to FE and HE provision in eight years' time. This may have a substantial impact on whether there is any future capacity issue.

5. The funding from the Scottish Futures Trust for the rebuild of JGHS was allocated on a like for like basis. As the current school provides for GME, the same should be true of the new school. In proposing to exclude GME provision from the new school, **CEC would be failing to deliver like for like provision.**

#### **Alternatives to relocating GME from JGHS:**

There is too much uncertainty over future capacity at JGHS to base any decisions on the currently available information. However, **in the event that capacity were to become a problem in future, there are alternatives to relocating GME.**

1. The investment in GME within JGHS and its cluster schools as described previously means that it would be particularly difficult and costly to relocate GME. An **alternative and far more cost-effective option would be to address the issue by changing the catchment boundaries for JGHS.**

This was done four years ago to balance demand and resolve a number of anomalies, and CnP sees no reason why this could not be reviewed again in the event that capacity does prove to be an issue in eight years' time. There are several neighbouring secondary schools with spare capacity, which in some cases would involve a shorter travelling distance for those within the current JGHS catchment. Such a move would be far less disruptive than moving GME as it would be a move from one

mainstream school to another, **so there would be no need to change the staffing or provision in any school.**

2. In the event that CEC is successful in developing and increasing take-up of GME, it may be that at a future date, numbers reach the level where it is appropriate to **move to a best practice solution reflecting the highly successful example of Sgoil Ghàidhlig Glaschu.** It is therefore recognised that **the long-term strategic development of GME at secondary level might, in due course, entail a move to another location.** Such a move would however require to be carefully considered and would have to build directly on the successes of JGHS in Gaelic development. An interim move to another high school would incur unnecessary costs and disruption. Feedback from parents suggests that uncertainty in secondary provision will most certainly have a negative impact on uptake of GME in Edinburgh.

**CnP is unaware of any other situation where a group of pupils has been relocated purely on the basis of forecasts of what pupil numbers may be in eight years' time, and without any consideration of other options that may exist at that time.**

It is the view of CnP that **any move of secondary GME at this time is entirely unnecessary, costly, educationally detrimental, and highly damaging to Scottish Government targets for Gaelic.**

Leis gach deagh dhùrachd

Alasdair Cameron  
Convenor  
Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann & Lodainn)

12 November 2010