

Comann nam Pàrant
(Dùn Èideann & Lodainn)

Response to the City of Edinburgh
Council proposals to develop
Gaelic Medium Education
in Edinburgh

An Lùnastal 2010
(August 2010)

An t-ionnsachadh òg an t-ionnsachadh bòidheach

“Early learning is beautiful learning”

(Gaelic proverb)

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Summary

1. Management Summary

This paper is intended to summarise the views of Comann nam Pàrant (CnP) in response to the City of Edinburgh Council's (CEC) proposals to develop Gaelic medium education at pre-school and primary school level (GME) in Edinburgh.

Comann nam Pàrant is a voluntary association which aims to promote and support GME in Edinburgh and the Lothians. It is the representative body for parents with children in GME.

The **Council's proposals**, as set out in the report *Options for the Development of Gaelic Medium Education* of 15th June 2010, and further clarified at a meeting on 27th July 2010 between CnP and the CEC asset management team, are as follows:

Either:

The establishment of a dedicated Gaelic medium primary school on the site of the former Bonnington Primary School. This site to include a nursery with capacity of 40 spaces in each year group.

Or

The retention of the current GME unit at Tollcross Primary School, with a new GME unit to be started at Leith Walk Primary School. One central GME nursery to be provided with expanded provision. The new nursery to be constructed within the Tollcross playground. Under this option, all pupils currently attending the Tollcross unit would continue at that site, and the new unit at Leith Walk would begin with one primary 1 class, and grow organically year on year. Pupils would be allocated between the units on the basis of a geographical split of the city, approximately East / West.

These options are further discussed below.

CnP strongly recommends that the dedicated school option be selected in preference to the two-unit model for the following main reasons:

- It is a proven model for increasing fluency and for normalising the use of Gaelic.
- It is a model that has been demonstrated to secure rapid growth, enabling CEC to achieve Government targets for increasing the number of Gaelic speakers through GME.
- It offers the most efficient delivery of GME within Edinburgh.
- There are, in the view of CnP, serious difficulties with the two-unit model, which make it unworkable:
 - Pupils at Leith Walk primary are likely to suffer an educational detriment compared to a large immersion community such as exists at Tollcross.
 - It suffers from the lack of a large supportive GME community.
 - For the reasons above, there is a high risk that uptake will be low at Leith Walk. This is in addition to practical difficulties with the arrangements, and because growth to date has depended largely on parental word-of-mouth recommendation. Low uptake would seriously compromise the current healthy growth rate in GME.
 - It is unlikely to alleviate the pressure of numbers at Tollcross, where numbers will continue to grow.
- A dedicated GME school will contribute to raising attainment for Edinburgh's pupils.
- A dedicated school will place Edinburgh among the top tier of GME providers nationally providing CEC with a success story that can be show-cased to the greater prestige of Scotland's capital.

GME schools are set up to bring the advantages of Gaelic fluency to any child. They are socially inclusive – they welcome all children whose families want them to be educated through Gaelic: children of all communities, social backgrounds, ethnic groups, geographies, family circumstances, disabilities and faiths. In at least 60% of the families the parents are not fluent – in other words, schools are precisely the sort of intervention that can help Gaelic use and fluency to grow.

2. Dedicated Gaelic Medium Primary School

The proposed dedicated GME primary school will provide GME from nursery through to primary 7 on one site.

The current educational experience of the children at the Tollcross GME unit is exceptionally high. This is evidenced by HMIE reports, the latest of which will be issued in final form on 24th August 2010. We are confident that this latest report will support our view of the excellent education offered at Tollcross.

The exceptional education provided at the Tollcross unit results from a combination of factors, which include:

- The commitment and enthusiasm of our excellent teachers, many of whom have been with us for decades and have seen their own children through the school.
- The support of parents, who are actively involved in both academic and extra-curricular activities.
- The unique involvement of parents, staff, and children across the age groups in a wide range of activities, leading to a strong and supportive school community.

- The wider input from the Gaelic community, particularly in assisting with the cultural aspects of our children's education.
- The high expectations staff and parents have of the children.

In our view, the move to a dedicated GME school will safeguard and further enhance this exceptional educational experience for our children, by keeping our school community together and providing a focus for the wider Gaelic community in Edinburgh.

In addition to maintaining the current educational experience for pupils, a dedicated school will provide a number of significant advantages in comparison with the two-unit option, as explained below:

2.1. Fluency

With Gaelic being the language of the whole school, there are more instances, and more diverse opportunities (playground, dining-room, assembly, trips, etc) to use Gaelic. Many pupils in GME have limited exposure to Gaelic outside of the school, and it is therefore essential that the school environment provides the language in a range of different contexts in order for full fluency to be achieved.

It is important that pupils see Gaelic as more than just a "classroom language". As with any minority language, the perceived status and value attached to Gaelic is an important factor influencing retention and use by young people. Encountering and employing Gaelic in a range of settings, including when interacting with key individuals within the wider school community (such as the Head Teacher, School Secretary or Janitor) is important both educationally and in bolstering the self-esteem of young Gaelic-speakers.

In Glasgow, the secondary teachers noticed a marked improvement in fluency of the S1 intakes after the dedicated primary opened.

In minority language education, the following points are of particular importance:

- The more that the minority language features in the school experience, the stronger will be the pupils' competence and confidence in the language.
- The stronger the pupils competence and confidence in the language; the more likely they will be to use it in later life in work, home and in leisure.

The more these elements feature in minority language education, the greater will be the appeal and credibility of minority language education among parents, educationalists and the wider community.

2.2. Development

Bòrd na Gàidhlig, in its action plan, *Ginealach Ùr na Gàidhlig*, has reaffirmed as one of its main priorities increasing the number of Gaelic speakers through GME.

Bòrd na Gàidhlig's *National Plan for Gaelic* aims for 4,000 entrants to be enrolled in primary 1 GME across Scotland by 2021. Edinburgh, as a centre of rapid growth, has a responsibility to meet a percentage of the total Bòrd na Gàidhlig national targets as set out in the *National Plan for Gaelic* - the Edinburgh target is 400 entering primary 1 by 2021.

These ambitious targets require that local authorities increase numbers in local authority pre-school and primary 1 GME classes by 15%, on average, per annum.

The increased accommodation available at the dedicated school site will make these targets achievable, particularly given the following factors:

- GME has an excellent reputation in Edinburgh.
- There is at present almost no advertising of GME in Edinburgh, and its reputation is spread through word of mouth. A new school would create additional publicity.
- Even with a low rate of awareness of GME of only around one third (Edinburgh household survey) the Tollcross unit has demonstrated that it can sustain high rates of growth.
- This is particularly evident with our current nursery being at capacity, and we expect that the further nursery capacity possibilities of the dedicated school site will continue to allow numbers to develop.

The dedicated school gives parents more confidence in making the choice of GME for their families. A school can demonstrate that the authorities value GME, and that there is a commitment to it being a permanent feature, not an annex, or a movable entity that can be transplanted at will. This confidence is very important for the stability and development of Gaelic more generally within the community, and to the self-esteem of Gaelic speakers.

There will also be significant benefits for the Gaelic community in Edinburgh, in having a focus for community events and adult learning.

It is therefore important that the need for a dedicated school is understood not only at an educational level, but also in the context of national policy on Gaelic and as a delivery mechanism for City of Edinburgh Council's own Gaelic Language Plan (currently under development).

2.3. Efficiency

A dedicated GME school will provide the more efficient use of resources.

We believe that Sgoil Ghàidhlig Dhùn Èideann will become a "magnet" primary school in Edinburgh. The evidence from Glasgow's experience is that the publicity around the opening of the school will lead to an immediate increase in applications for places. As more families opt for GME, the number of classes rises, making better use of school resources, and class sizes become or remain high, maintaining efficient use of teachers. So, the dedicated school solution represents better value for money than the two-unit option.

The following efficiency advantages should also be considered:

- In comparison with other popular primary schools in Edinburgh, Sgoil Ghàidhlig Dhùn Èideann will have the advantage of a reputation that is not tied to one specific area of the city.
- With its own site and identity, Sgoil Ghàidhlig Dhùn Èideann will prove advantageous in taking some pressure off other popular central primary schools.

We understand that value for money is an important consideration for CEC. We have considered the capital and revenue cost implications of the dedicated school option in our separately submitted finance paper, and believe this demonstrates the value for money that a dedicated school offers.

2.4. Aspirations of Parents

All families whose children are educated through the medium of Gaelic share a common belief: that GME is good for their children, and should be secured and developed.

In Edinburgh, our parent group believes the best way to begin to achieve this is through the establishment of a dedicated GME primary school.

In the summer of 2008, as a result of accommodation pressure in the Gaelic medium unit at Tollcross, CnP held a series of meetings for parents to discuss the various options for dealing with the increase in pupil numbers. A unanimous decision was reached at a well-attended open meeting of CnP on 29th September 2008 that a dedicated school was the preferred option.

Following further extensive discussion and consultation within the parent group, this consensus has been reiterated at a series of meetings of CnP, the latest being on 2nd August 2010.

While it is the view of CnP that a dedicated GME primary school is the better option for our children, our community, and for Gaelic in general, there are practical concerns that we wish to highlight on behalf of parents:

2.4.1. Transport Time

The current Tollcross unit is increasingly used by families living within a short travelling distance of the school. Some of these families have expressed concern about the increased travel time, and would have preferred a more central location. CnP accepts that CEC has explored all possible options for providing a central location for a dedicated Gaelic school, and that no suitable location is available.

However, in order to assist the transition to the new location for these local families, CnP would like to investigate the possibility with CEC of running a bus between Tollcross and Sgoil Ghàidhlig Dhùn Èideann at drop-off and pick-up times, in order to minimise impact on these families.

CnP has carried out initial research into the travel times for typical journeys to the new school, and while some children travelling from the west of the city will have longer journeys than at present, it is unlikely that many would have a journey of over an hour.

There are currently a few children attending Tollcross from outside CEC area, for example West Lothian, East Lothian and Fife. The new location is likely to increase journey times for some of these children, but the suggested bus from Tollcross will mean that the increase is no more than around 20 minutes on top of current travel times. In the longer term, CnP hopes to assist parents in these areas to establish GME provision within their own Council areas.

2.4.2. Nursery Capacity

An additional measure that CnP wishes CEC to consider is the retention of the current nursery in Tollcross as a second GME nursery, in addition to that in Sgoil Ghàidhlig Dhùn Èideann. This will bring the dual benefits of:

- Expanding overall GME nursery provision, which will ensure increasing numbers entering the school, and rapidly secure its status.
- Easing the transition for local Tollcross families by offering local provision for those with very young children, particularly if the current Croileagan (parent and toddler group) based at Tollcross can be retained.

CnP is in a position to provide assistance to CEC with investigating this option, in terms of providing further detail on resources, and future probable numbers.

3. Second GME Unit at Leith Walk

The proposed new unit would be established with one primary 1 class, and would take in new pupils each year to build up to a full unit of primaries 1-7. There would be a catchment area for the new unit, and for the existing Tollcross unit, which would be most likely to be along the lines of an East / West division of the city.

The new unit would not provide nursery education, which would continue to be provided in an expanded site at Tollcross.

It is our view that the establishment of a second unit at Leith Walk is not a desirable option. There are educational, developmental and practical concerns which arise from the proposal. These are summarised below:

3.1. Language Issues

The small size of the new unit at Leith Walk would mean that the pupils there would have a less rich educational experience than those at Tollcross. It is unlikely to be realistic to create an environment in which Gaelic enjoys equal status alongside English as an official language of the school (with, for example, the Head Teacher being able to communicate with Gaelic pupils in their own language and Gaelic being used on an equal basis at events for the whole school).

There is a very real danger that the creation of a second GME centre in Edinburgh would lead to the dilution and weakening of the GME experience for all GME pupils in Edinburgh.

Initially there would not be a mix of age groups at the new unit. It is particularly important for younger pupils in a language immersion schooling environment to hear the language spoken with more fluency by older pupils. This is recognised at Tollcross, and there are a number of ways in which the age groups are encouraged to mix, for example:

- During “golden time” – on a Friday the children choose a classroom and participate in an activity organised by any one of the GME teachers, allowing all the classes to mix.
- Playground pals – where older children supervise games in the playground.
- Buddies – some older children spend time assisting younger pupils in their classroom work, with language and educational benefits to both parties.
- Weekly Gaelic assembly, where all the GME pupils join together to share experiences and to sing and play music.

This exposure to other more fluent speakers is particularly important for the current and future GME intakes, as the majority are from families where Gaelic is not the principal language of the home.

A further initial concern is that there would be only one teacher present at the new unit in the first year. Gaelic is a varied language with many different accents and pronunciations. To achieve a full linguistic experience, learners ideally should be interacting with a wide number of fluent adult speakers, and observing them interact through Gaelic. Children’s perception of the status of the language is also a vital factor in successful language learning.

It is accepted that the Tollcross unit was begun with a very small number of pupils, all of whom received a very high standard of education, which did not suffer because of the above mentioned issues.

However, we should note that the Tollcross unit was established by fluent Gaelic-speaking parents. The initial pupils at the Tollcross unit were receiving significant exposure to the language in their own homes. The success of the GME unit at Tollcross has made it attractive to families who do not speak Gaelic (often as a consequence of negative historical attitudes to Gaelic and the absence of meaningful provision for Gaelic in education prior to the 1980s). As a consequence, most of our new pupils now are not regularly exposed to fluent speakers outwith the school environment. The linguistic experience of school therefore becomes crucially significant to their development as competent speakers of Gaelic.

3.2. Education Issues

The lack of a reasonably sized peer and adult community in our urban setting would be educationally detrimental. This would affect children as long as the new unit at Leith Walk remained small. There is a risk, if enrolment is low, that this could be a factor for many years.

Opportunities for wide social and emotional interaction would be severely restricted, and exposure to the language would be in a very limited environment. These are vital areas of educational development, particularly in the context of a Curriculum for Excellence.

Furthermore, we believe that educational support, including special needs and cover for absence and McCrone time would be difficult to provide in many circumstances, and this risks further affecting the education that would be received.

3.3. Teaching Issues

It is generally accepted that a Gaelic medium teacher's workload is not equal with the workload of an English language teacher. Gaelic education is not on an equal footing with English language education in terms of teaching resources and support staff.

In a situation where Gaelic is, for many pupils, a new language when they enter Gaelic medium primary education, it is essential that the immersion phase, generally from P1 to P3, is as rich in the use of the language as possible. This can only be achieved in a class where the pupils have sufficient contact time with the teacher and is best achieved in an environment where Gaelic is more than a classroom language and where there is more than one teacher in place.

English language teachers will generally have access to support not available in Gaelic, leaving the Gaelic medium teacher to cope with additional needs on their own, at the same time as immersing children in another language. This lack of parity is a feature of Gaelic medium education currently, particularly in a situation where there is a small unit in an English language school.

It would be challenging and unsatisfactory for a teacher to operate in isolation within a new small unit, with only limited opportunities to interact with and share experience with other Gaelic colleagues.

At the very least, it would be necessary to appoint a highly experienced teacher to the post. In the context of a relatively small number of qualified Gaelic teachers in Edinburgh, the relative isolation of such an experienced individual from the main unit would inevitably tend to limit opportunities for him or her to contribute to further developing and maintaining excellence across GME in Edinburgh as a whole. As a career option, it is unlikely to be nearly as attractive for a teacher as would be a role within a dedicated school. This would present recruitment issues.

3.4. Continuing Capacity Issues at Tollcross

The assumption has been made that the second unit at Leith Walk Primary would provide additional capacity to accommodate increasing numbers of children entering GME, and thus alleviate the pressure on space at Tollcross. We believe that this is unlikely to be achieved due to:

- continued rising demand for GME from families local to Tollcross
- the increase in Tollcross numbers unlikely to be offset by numbers transferred to Leith Walk, particularly given sibling placement requests at Tollcross (which we understand are likely to be automatically granted).

Conditions in the wider Tollcross area, in particular, are likely to lead to a significantly increased demand – because of the proximity of the nursery, and because of the current concentration of GME families, particularly those with very young children. There is firm evidence that parental recommendation is the largest factor in attracting new families.

CEC’s own projections forecast rapid growth in numbers of city centre children reaching primary school age. Many of these are local to Tollcross, and are likely to choose GME due to increasing awareness of Gaelic and the benefits of bilingualism. Data from the 2001 census illustrated the relative concentration of the Gaelic community in central Edinburgh, with a particular focus around the Tollcross area.

There is a significant proportion of local children, particularly in the younger age groups of the current Tollcross unit, and it is highly likely that demand for GME will continue to rise in this group. It is not unrealistic to project a growth rate of GME take-up amongst this local group of around 15% per year, as is indeed required in order to meet Government targets.

The restriction of GME to a single stream places an effective limit of 25 on the number of places at Tollcross without incurring the additional expenditure of team teaching. Even then, accommodation limitations would, we believe, make it difficult to routinely accommodate more than 30 in a single class.

We believe such a limit means that Tollcross will rapidly return to position of accommodation pressure. This could possibly emerge even as soon as 2012/13 (we are already aware of high numbers from nursery enrolments).

The following diagram illustrates the projected growth of GME within Tollcross against capacity, assuming around one third of current numbers would be accommodated at Leith Walk. It shows capacity with an assumed number of 100 children within mainstream EME, and on the total capacity of the school without EME. This illustrates that even at 15% growth, and without allowing for the class size limits described above, capacity would be exceeded in around four years.

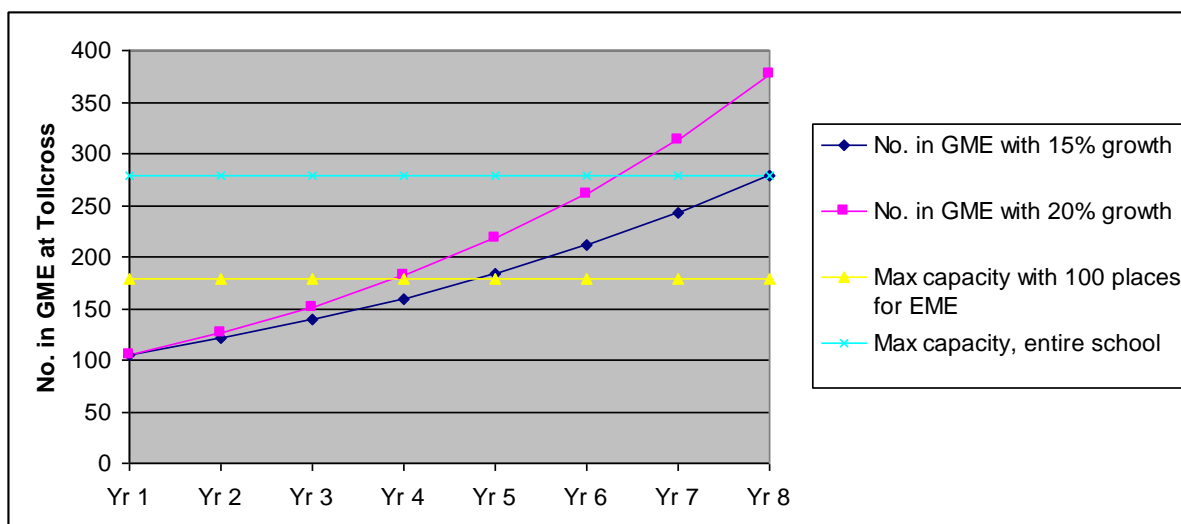


Figure 1: Projected growth rates in Tollcross GME against available capacity

3.5. Probable Low Take-Up of Leith Walk Unit

We believe that there are many factors that make the risk of a low rate of enrolment at the new Leith Walk unit high.

The educational and linguistic difficulties we have outlined would discourage parents from choosing GME, and the differences between the experiences at the two units would be likely to lead to significant dissatisfaction.

Due to the lack of nursery provision, parents not qualifying for transport in the Eastern catchment would need to travel to Tollcross for nursery and then Leith Walk from primary 1 onwards. For families with more than one child (which is the vast majority within the current unit) this would present a major practical challenge.

For example: such a family with a primary school age child (at Leith Walk) and a child in the afternoon nursery session (at Tollcross), would in theory be required to pick both children up at 3.15pm.

Ultimately these practical issues would either act as a significant barrier and deter families from entering GME, or would result in considerable pressure to allow admission to the Tollcross unit rather than Leith Walk (by analogy with out-of-catchment placing requests for English-medium schools).

There is already some anecdotal evidence of parents being unwilling to send their children to Leith Walk, or even considering moving house in order to be within the Tollcross “catchment”. There is a sense that those attending Leith Walk would receive a vastly inferior educational and linguistic experience compared to those attending Tollcross, and this would be likely to cause ongoing issues and parental dissatisfaction.

Another significant risk is that parental recommendation is the predominant factor in attracting new families into GME. With a very small initial pool of parents, the growth of the Leith Walk unit would be likely to be slow. It is unlikely that growth would occur any faster than Tollcross, which took 22 years to reach its current size. This would significantly compromise the success of GME in the city.

All of this would be a serious distraction from the shared aim of CnP, CEC and the Scottish Government of ensuring good quality GME being available to all.

3.6. Equal Opportunities Issues

We believe that the practical obstacles presented by locating the nursery unit at Tollcross, but primary provision at Leith Walk, may impact disproportionately on individuals from less-advantaged backgrounds, who will be less likely to have the employment flexibility and financial resources necessary to deal with a split-site solution. It would be highly undesirable for a situation to emerge in which access to GME became determined by socio-economic factors rather than parental choice.

In addition, the small scale of the new unit would be likely to present practical and financial challenges in the provision of support staff for any children with additional support needs. These

could be accommodated far more easily within a larger dedicated school, where economies of scale will allow cost-effective utilisation of such staff. These difficulties in providing necessary support would be likely to act as a barrier to children with additional support needs choosing to enter GME, which should be equally accessible to all.

4. Conclusion

CnP welcomes CEC's willingness to expand and enhance GME in response to rising demand, and the detailed consideration of the possible options for delivering this.

For the reasons outlined above, it is the view of CnP that the only appropriate option is that of a dedicated school. Whilst a city centre location would have been preferable, CnP accepts that at present, the only possible location for Sgoil Ghàidhlig Dhùn Èideann is on the site of the former Bonnington Primary.

CnP does not believe that a second unit at Leith Walk Primary presents a way forward, either in terms of delivery of good quality GME, achieving robust growth at Leith Walk, or in resolving the problems of overcrowding at Tollcross.

CnP therefore:

- Invites CEC to approve the option of establishing a dedicated Gaelic school.
- Seeks to work with CEC to overcome any practical issues that the chosen location presents.

Appendices

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Appendix 1: Benefits of Dedicated GME Schools

The experience of Glasgow has shown us that dedicated Gaelic Medium Education schools are *not just preferable, but are*

- essential to securing the future of Gaelic,
- important in delivering the highest quality of Gaelic educational experience, and
- best able to deliver value for money

This is not to say that units are poor; rather, while they deliver good results, there is the potential to do even better with dedicated schools. Here is what was found in Glasgow:

They **improve fluency**. With Gaelic being the language of the whole school, there are more instances, and more diverse opportunities (playground, dining-room, assembly, trips, etc) to use Gaelic. The secondary teachers in Glasgow noticed a marked improvement in fluency of the S1 intakes after the primary opened.

They **enhance confidence levels**. Among parents confidence in GME is essential, and it grows with the advent of a school. A school can demonstrate that the authorities value GME, and that there is a commitment to it being a permanent feature, not an annex, or a movable entity that can be transplanted at will. This confidence is very important for the stability and development of Gaelic more generally within the community, and to the self-esteem of Gaelic speakers (including, crucially, young Gaelic speakers).

They help to **increase teacher supply**. Self-evidently, schools need head-teachers, and so for every Gaelic school there will be a GME head-teacher job. GME posts are a very under-represented group at head-teacher level in Scotland: 1 in 200 in GME, as opposed to 1 in 20 elsewhere. To have more GME head-teachers and promoted jobs, as would be necessary with more schools, will make a healthy impact on the supply of GME teachers. It would both encourage people into GME, knowing that there were attractive career opportunities, and, crucially, help to *retain* them. At present some of the ambitious and capable teaching staff transfer from the sector due to the limited career prospects.

They can **improve academic attainment**. Teachers can focus exclusively on a single, integrated teaching model in a Gaelic school. Therefore timetabling, topic work, trips, the teaching environment etc, are geared around one system of education. In Glasgow this has led to excellent results in the National tests, and an outstanding HMI Inspection Report (<http://www.hmie.gov.uk/documents/inspection/GlasgowGaelicPSF29130.html>). In some schools with GME units a lot of teacher energy and time is spent on non-value adding activities, such as managing the relationship between the two units – Gaelic and English.

They help to **secure continuity of provision**. Because there are actual schools, that attract and retain teachers and pupils, greater continuity and stability can be expected. Schools are, in many instances, likely to be larger than the units that preceded them, and so will have more teachers. This critical mass makes it easier to provide cover in times of absence, allowing better continuity in GME than is found in many units.

They **increase the pupil numbers in GME**. For all these reasons – fluency, continuity, teacher availability and attainment, parents are more likely to opt for GME, and to stay with it for the duration of their child’s education. Glasgow has witnessed a 100% increase in the roll since the advent of the school. This has been without any promotion, and within a constrained building that meant there have been very large infant classes in recent years.

They are **more efficient**. As more families opt for GME, and class sizes, on average, increase, the output per teacher rises and cost per pupil falls. So, the dedicated school solution represents better value for money than a two-unit option and had the capacity to deliver efficiencies of scale that a unit-based approach cannot achieve.

Schools **represent best practice and are the international norm** in bilingual education. The worldwide experience of successful minority language development uses the whole-school, immersion teaching model. Scotland is unusual in that it has persisted with units inside schools for so long. In both Wales and Ireland, the whole school model has been used virtually universally. Dedicated schools are also the norm in progressive countries such as Finland, where educational provision reflects a constitutional guarantee of minority rights and has been instrumental in securing the survival of the minority Swedish community.

Appendix 2: Benefits of Bilingualism and Immersion Language Schooling

There are numerous academic studies which provide evidence of the benefits of bilingualism; and indeed of the international preference for full immersion schools. Below is a brief summary of some of the findings:

Benefits of Bilingualism

The benefits of bilingualism are universally acknowledged and significant academic and other research has been undertaken in this area. Its importance should not be understated and a brief outline of the benefits is given below. The key general benefits are:

- Literacy and conceptual thinking are better developed in the child with a second language.
- Cognitive transfer and literacy is increased and developed, including creative thinking, sensitivity, IQ and reading.
- Learning additional languages becomes easier along with other educational benefits.
- There are employment advantages to Scotland, as a whole, as those with more than one language are an asset to the country.
- Bilingualism increases tolerance of other languages and cultures. The traditional antipathy towards foreign languages can be reduced and thus foreign cultures can be understood and embraced. The general theory is that speaking, learning and practice in two languages means higher attainment in other fields.

Benefits of Gaelic Bilingualism

The Gaelic language has been given secure status in Scotland through the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. The benefits of Gaelic bilingualism are in addition to those noted above. Again, considerable research has been undertaken on this particular form of bilingualism. In summary, the key benefits identified from this, and other research, are:

- Cultural inheritance. The language allows individuals and communities to maintain (and in many cases recover) a clear sense of their own personal cultural identity and a direct connection with their historical and cultural roots. Such identity is not exclusive and Gaelic speakers have full access to English-language and other cultures.
- It helps raise self-esteem in being a Gàidheal, and part of both the immediate Scottish Gaelic community and the wider Gaelic cultural world (spanning Ireland, the Isle of Man and Nova Scotia), through taking a pride in the language and its associated culture.

- There is increased involvement in the Gaelic community and its activities, thus preserving traditional Gaelic and Scottish culture including music and dance. It also encourages confidence in performance and speaking in public.
- Current GME pupils have recorded higher attainment than their monolingual peers in many subjects, particularly in Glasgow and Edinburgh GME delivery. Research suggests that this is due to increased cognitive transfer and the benefits of a second language.
- Employment opportunities for Gaelic speakers are increasing and there are areas of the economy and public life where Gaelic has an increasingly high profile such as media and the arts, politics and political support, teaching and tourism.
- The current delivery of GME is a very inclusive model as there are a large number of pupils from a range of cultural backgrounds whose parents recognise the benefits of a bilingual community. Indeed, a significant number of Gaelic speakers are multi-lingual, rather than simply bi-lingual.

The benefits of GME and bilingualism contribute towards the Curriculum for Excellence in relationship to good citizenship which also covers diversity.

There is now complete support from the Scottish Government on bilingual (English/Gaelic) identity and encouragement for dedicated Gaelic schools. Ministers have been persuaded of the fluency and learning benefits from the dedicated school model in Glasgow and the numbers being attracted to it. The recent widening of Gaelic television and, in particular, BBC Alba has increased vocabulary and helped bridge the gap between the educational and social aspects of the language.

Partly adapted from the Gaelic Education Feasibility Study, (March 2009)

Immersion Language Schools

The term “immersion education” was adopted in the 1960s to describe programmes in Canada where a second language is used as the medium of instruction in schools. English speaking children being taught entirely through the medium of French in selected schools in Quebec.

Johnson, R. K. & Swain, M. (1997)

Research indicates that in full immersion programs, children develop initial literacy in the immersion language, and then develop a complete understanding of the foreign language. However, the benefits do not stop there. In fact, the many cognitive processes that underlie the ability to read a foreign language, such as understanding the relationship between the spoken language and the written word, transfer from one language to another. In essence, research shows that a full immersion program not only teaches students a foreign language, it strengthens their understanding of their native language as well.

A full immersion school exposes children to cultures they may not regularly encounter on a day-to-day basis, and it develops in them an ability to make friends and connections with a variety of classmates. Full immersion schools show students how to think globally, yet act locally – a mindset that is becoming more and more important these days.

Grace Chen (2008) : Full Language Immersion Programs in Public Schools 19,

A study by Baetens Beardsmore and Swain (1985) compared students in French medium programs in Canada and in Brussels. In Brussels the language was used outside as well as inside the classroom, whereas in Canada there was limited or no exposure to French outside the classroom. The students

in Brussels required only half the time taken by the Canadian students to acquire comparable levels of French proficiency.

Johnson, R. K. & Swain, M. (1997). Immersion Education: International Perspectives .

One unusual feature of Gaelic-medium primary education in Scotland has been its reliance on Gaelic-medium units within English-medium schools rather than free-standing Gaelic schools of the kind preferred in Ireland, Wales and other minority language jurisdictions (*McLeod 2003*). Because children in Gaelic 'units' are surrounded by Englishmonoglot fellow pupils and staff, language immersion is significantly constrained and Gaelic language acquisition is not as effective as it might be (*see MacNeil & Stradling 2000; cf. Johnstone et al. 1999*).

In a dedicated Gaelic School, the "immersion method" which prevails in the Gaelic medium classroom is extended to the whole school and to the whole of the pupils' school day. This whole Gaelic environment helps to ensure young people develop their Gaelic language outside the classroom as well as in it. It gives young people the opportunity to play and learn in an environment that is totally focused on Gaelic. International research indicates that total immersion programmes are the most effective approach available to second language teaching in school settings.

Genesee, F, (1994). Integrating Language and Content: Lessons from Immersion. Education Practice Report: 11. National Centre for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning

Appendix 3: History of the Tollcross Unit

The Gaelic medium unit was launched more than 20 years ago in 1988 with a composite of seven pupils, but momentum for it had been building for nearly a decade before that. It was sparked by members of the Greyfriars Church congregation who worked together to organise a small, weekly playgroup dubbed “Car a’ mhuiltean” to symbolise that nothing short of “somersaults” was necessary to achieve their ambition of a Gaelic medium school in Edinburgh. The group gradually expanded through word of mouth among native speakers until it outgrew its small church room. The committee approached what is now Edinburgh City Council and found the head teacher at Tollcross Primary School, Gordon MacRae, to be very supportive. He helpfully offered two unused rooms where the nursery currently exists.

Unlike the present, most of the parents then were fluent Gaelic speakers, but as the nursery built-up a strong reputation, the group became more and more mixed. Initially all involved were unpaid parent volunteers raising their own funds through coffee mornings and jumble and car boot sales in the school grounds. Following years of campaigning, the organisers finally received limited state funding, but it was never guaranteed beyond a year and was fought for annually. This enabled a qualified playgroup leader to be employed and soon the sessions were held on a daily basis. As the children aged, the movement turned its attention to primary school education and began to battle for a council backed Gaelic class. Finally in 1988 the parents, working with educational advisers, won government funding for a Gaelic primary unit. The first class comprised just seven pupils ranging from P1 to P3.

The only school resources available were in English, so parent volunteers became heavily involved in producing Gaelic equivalents. After first translating the texts, they wrote out the Gaelic, cut the words into the appropriate shapes and carefully pasted them into the books. And each and every one was done separately. Mona, now a senior lecturer in Gaelic at the Jordanhill campus of education with Strathclyde University, says she would have struggled without the extra help: “The parents were fantastic, so supportive, keen and enthusiastic. They really helped make it work. Whenever I needed anything, all I had to do was ask.”

The unit blossomed and more than 20 years later is continuing to thrive. The pupils, now numbering in the hundreds, are not only generally happy and well cared for but performing extremely well. This success is due to the genuine dedication of both staff and parents who are so willing to give up their time and energy to support the school.

Valerie MacGregor

Appendix 4: Views of Parents

The following article by Valerie MacGregor reflects the views of a number of Tollcross parents:

Bilingualism – Brain Boost

A growing body of research shows that early bilingualism improves a child's performance in school across the board and opens up opportunities both at home and internationally.

"This is something that Scots families across the country can take advantage of whether they have Gaelic or not and really benefit from," explains novelist Martin MacIntyre, 44, of Edinburgh. "I was shocked to learn that an Edinburgh Council household survey showed that more than 70 per cent of respondents did not know that the Gaelic medium unit, which is 20 years old, was available and open to all in the city."

Senior lecturer in Celtic at Edinburgh University, Wilson McLeod, 46, outlines the benefits of bilingualism: "It promotes a different way of thinking that allows people to see connections in a more integrated way than people with only one language. They can think out of the box and are not stuck in preconceived notions. It promotes analytical thinking.

"In countries like Wales and Ireland bilingual children do better on exams and there is an overall improvement in their performance."

Published research in Wales entitled "Competitive Edge" states that "data strongly supports the thesis that the bilingual sector is more effective than the English medium sector....the Welsh medium sector is clearly rated as more effective than every area studied by the inspectors, their bilingualism boosts cognitive performance and intellectual confidence and self esteem."

And in Scotland a recent study of school results in the Highlands, available on the Internet, showed that pupils in Gaelic classes outperformed other pupils.

The Highland Council study compared exam results in 2009 covering secondary one and two pupils across the region.

In many subjects, including English, Gaelic pupils scored about nine percent higher than the average for the year group in reading and writing and eight percent higher for maths.

Evidence suggests that bilingualism also improves the capacity for children to learn a third language and parent Katie Murray, a researcher with Ulpan (a Gaelic language course), agrees. Her sons Alan and David attended the Gaelic primary unit in Edinburgh. "The benefit they received is phenomenal. They performed better at secondary school because they went through the Gaelic classes,

particularly with language acquisition like German and French. Understanding languages was already built into their way of thinking.

Dr McLeod argues that such an advantage further helps with business and economic matters. "There is no question that being able to deal with people in their own language smooths transactions and makes things easier. It is a dangerous ideology that everybody speaks English when is not true, an ideology that places people at a disadvantage."

Closer to home, Gaelic speakers are continuing to find employment at a time when many sectors of the economy are contracting. "For some years it has been a sustained growth industry from the recently advertised jobs at Glasgow and Perth councils to the expansion of the new Gaelic television channel," says Martin MacIntyre, an award winning writer whose latest book *An Latha As Fhaide* (The Longest Day) was shortlisted for the 2008 Saltire Book of the Year prize. "And there are increasing opportunities in the arts sector. Gaelic singers and musicians are now able to make a living from their music as its popularity grows."

The Government recognises the benefits of bilingualism and has set aside cash for Gaelic education in Scotland. Dr McLeod says that it would be short sighted in the extreme for local councils, like Edinburgh's, not to use it.

At the moment, Edinburgh offers Gaelic within a mainstream English school at Tollcross, but despite being the capital city, has no all-Gaelic school like Glasgow.

"It is a weird unit model used in Scotland which is a deviation from normal practice. A unit within a mainstream school is diluted. An all-Gaelic school is a better model in terms of language progress and there is an overall sense of purpose that makes a bigger impact. This should be pursued in Scotland. It would be extremely short sighted for Edinburgh Council not to take advantage of Government money made available for Gaelic. It is a very good opportunity."

He rejects criticisms that it is too costly saying the school provision must be provided legally any way. "I understand that a recent feasibility study shows that there are convincing enough numbers to support an all-Gaelic school and with numbers growing it is a good investment," he added.

Parent Amaia Zulaika, 43, a mother of three at the Gaelic unit in Edinburgh, also supports an all-Gaelic school and believes that the city's language plan falls short in having no clear plans to provide one.

The art historian, who is from Spain, herself attended a Basque school. "In Spain, it is a huge success and I know that not only can a minority language school work but I know of the enormous advantages that it offers both academically and culturally.

"I did not have a word of Gaelic when I came to Edinburgh but my children all became fluent through their classes. Another great aspect of the school is its community spirit generated by its common pursuit. And the exposure the children have to Gaelic culture, music and dance is great. I do not live close to the school but the children travel on a school bus which they enjoy. Gaelic education is something that is open to families across Scotland without cost, and offers so much, it really is a fantastic opportunity."

Many Gaels now see their native language as a positive boost, but this is a huge sea change from a generation ago. Retired Edinburgh University lecturer Donald Meek, says: "There was once a feeling

The Development of GME in Edinburgh

among Gaels that being taught through Gaelic would be a drawback and not provide as powerful an education. Many Gaels a generation ago went to school without any English and saw that as a problem. In my grandmother's day people were even belted for speaking Gaelic."

Appendix 5: Scottish Government Guidance

Attached below is information provided by Riaghaltas na h-Alba (the Scottish Government) on Gaelic Medium Education. We would like to highlight that:

- “Gaelic is listed as a national priority in the Education (National Priorities) (Scotland) Order 2000,” and
- “Dedicated schools are both beneficial and desirable.”

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 specifies that "school education" includes "the teaching of Gaelic in Gaelic-speaking areas", and that local authorities should have regard to the principle that "pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents"

Specific Grants Regulations established a grants scheme in 1986 to assist with the teaching of the Gaelic language or the teaching in that language of other subjects. Government provides 75% grant funding and local education authorities are expected to top-up the grant with 25% of their Grant-Aided Expenditure. The Scheme of Specific Grants for Gaelic has been critical to the expansion and development of GME and Gaelic Learner Education (GLE) over the last twenty years and it has also facilitated the production of appropriate curriculum resources through Stòrlann Nàiseanta na Gàidhlig, the National Gaelic Resource Centre.

The Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 states that there is a duty on all education authorities in Scotland to publish an annual statement of improvement objectives which must include an account of the ways in which they will provide GME or the circumstances in which it will be supported. Gaelic is also listed as a national priority in the Education (National Priorities)(Scotland) Order 2000.

The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 enables Bòrd na Gàidhlig to offer advice or to issue guidance in relation to Gaelic education; the Bòrd has set out a National Gaelic Education Strategy within its National Plan for Gaelic; and the Bòrd is able to request the development of Gaelic language plans by individual public authorities, including education authorities.

Stòrlann produces Gaelic books and other learning and teaching materials for pre-school, primary and secondary education. Bòrd na Gàidhlig provides additional financial resources to Stòrlann to expand the range and quality of resources available to Gaelic schools.

Three local authorities have developed statutory five-year Gaelic Language Plans which set out how those local authorities will support the development of Gaelic education. The Highland Council has given a commitment to establish two new dedicated Gaelic schools during the lifetime of its plan. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles) has indicated its intention to introduce a policy of Gaelic Medium Education, in line with the National Gaelic Education Strategy, as mainstream primary

provision. It has also undertaken to plan for the expansion of GME as a significant part of secondary provision.

Six further bodies are in the process of developing Gaelic Language Plans. Five of these bodies are key education bodies: Scottish Funding Council, University of the Highland and Islands Millennium Institute, Learning and Teaching Scotland, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, Scottish Qualifications Authority, City of Edinburgh Council and Glasgow City Council are also developing Gaelic plans.

Statistics (2008)

- 718 children registered for Gaelic pre-school education.
- 2,164 pupils currently accessing GM primary education.
- 968 pupils studying Gàidhlig (fluent speakers) in secondary schools.
- 322 pupils studying other subjects through the medium of Gaelic in secondary.
- 2,733 pupils studying Gaelic learners' courses in secondary schools.
- Approximately 6,000 beginners being taught Gaelic Language in the Primary School.

The National Plan for Gaelic contains a National Gaelic Education Strategy. Bòrd na Gàidhlig has convened a National Gaelic Education Steering Group, which among other things, is addressing teacher recruitment and supply, the development of a core curriculum for secondary GME and increasing the range of subjects and national qualifications available in GME at all levels.

A number of important steps have been taken to extend and strengthen Gaelic-medium education. Gaelic is available at all levels of education with much improved resources and materials. In addition to core education funding, we provide significant additional resources to local authorities to assist them with the delivery of Gaelic education and support for teachers and pupils (through the Scheme of Specific Grants for Gaelic Education).

Gaelic schools

There has been good progress made with the Glasgow Gaelic school and the Inverness Gaelic school. Dedicated Gaelic schools are both beneficial and desirable. The Scottish Government is directing considerable support towards Gaelic education and we are increasing this funding. The establishment of a Gaelic school is a matter for individual councils but the Scottish Government will be happy to discuss these matters and consider what support can be provided.

In August 2006, the Glasgow Gaelic School opened for pre-school, primary and secondary pupils. They will be taught in Gaelic from ages 3-18 and it is expected that this will strengthen Gaelic subject delivery at secondary level in Scotland. In August 2007 the Gaelic primary opened in Inverness. This is Scotland's first purpose built Gaelic medium primary school. This school will be a focal point for Gaelic learning and activities in the Inverness area and has nursery and playgroup facilities.

Following consultation in 2006, Highland Council decided to designate Sleat Primary as a Gaelic Primary with an English Unit. There has also been some interest from parents in establishing a dedicated Gaelic Primaries in Portree and Fort William and Highland Council have agreed to take these forward. Interest has also been shown in Dingwall, Barra and Edinburgh. Pupils receive GME in 62 units in Primary Schools in Scotland.

Provision of Gaelic teachers

There is now a range of measures in place to encourage young people to take up a career in Gaelic teaching. This includes distance learning courses, part time courses and conversion courses. In addition, we are supporting Bòrd na Gàidhlig's teacher recruitment campaign and the Gaelic teacher recruitment officer at Bòrd na Gàidhlig.