

**City of Edinburgh Council Education, Children and Families Committee**  
**22nd May 2018**

**Item 7.2**

**Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann) – Written Submission**

This submission is made on behalf of Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann), the representative organisation for families with children in all stages of Gaelic-medium education (GME) in Edinburgh; and on behalf of Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce Parent Council.

We are grateful for the opportunity to comment on the report on the *Outcome of the Informal Consultation on the Future of Gaelic Medium Education* (the “interim report”). The interim report highlights a number of the ideas and actions which have been discussed since the informal consultation engagement events, and during many other meetings over the past decade.

**Summary Position**

We support the recommendations of the interim report, and we look forward to achieving cross-party agreement to ensure the implementation of these recommendations.

We highlight in particular recommendation 1.3 to prepare: “a strategic plan for the whole journey of Gaelic Medium Education growth and development from Early Years to Secondary.” We ask for a clear commitment from the committee today to support this recommendation, and to recognise the urgency of providing a plan which gives certainty for GME families.

We expect Edinburgh Council to provide such a plan by August 2018. The detail in the strategic plan, referenced in the interim report, must enable our parents, carers, and children to clearly see the GME pathway from 0-18. This clarity is needed so we can make decisions for our children’s education based on facts, not hopes.

The primary focus of GME families remains the quality of education and the entitlement to immersion GME. We therefore welcome commitments in the report to:

- maintain and improve the quality of GME,
- improve and enhance GME,
- examine the work force recruitment and retention strategy, and
- increase the curriculum offer at JGHS.

**Short Life Working Group**

We welcome the recommendation to create a short life working group tasked with developing and delivering the key priorities of teacher recruitment and retention, along with delivering a growth strategy to meet the current and the increasing demand of GME. This group should meet immediately, and we note that the intention in establishing this group is to develop and deliver solutions to solve the current critical staffing issues, and develop and implement a plan for the sustainable growth of GME. We look forward to swift and successful outcomes to achieve an actionable plan by August 2018.

Edinburgh Council took an important step forward in 2011 when all parties approved the establishment of Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce. The Council's vision has been rewarded with the demand for GME increasing and our thriving school now operating at near capacity. The growth of GME in Edinburgh is a success story for this Council, and has created a valuable asset for the city. Whilst primary is not referenced directly in this report, we would also expect the short life working group to look at this with equal urgency to the secondary provision, especially with the sgoil-àraich provision being increased in August 2018

Rapid expansion does however create some challenges. Children in GME are entitled to immersion throughout the period of their Broad General Education (Education Scotland: *Advice on Gaelic Education*, February 2015). This means that the curriculum should be delivered through the medium of Gaelic, to allow the children to develop their vocabulary, and leave their education as fluent adult speakers of Gaelic. In order for GME to be delivered in line with this entitlement, adequate fluent staffing needs to be in place.

Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce currently delivers approximately 60% immersion, as opposed to the 100% immersion to which the GME children are entitled. However, fluent resources are concentrated in the lower primary year groups (the "full immersion" stage), with the result that the senior primary years are operating at an even lower level. This clearly has a follow on effect in the quality of Gaelic that children have when they move into secondary and the SQA years. Coupled with the lack of GME staff at secondary level, we are currently looking at an urgent challenge in staffing.

One of the initiatives, approved in Edinburgh Council's Gaelic Language Plan 2018-2022, and referenced in the Teacher Recruitment Report 7.5 – 3.10 (p4) is to re-configure support in communities and families to create a Service Manager post to support education from 0-18 by July 2018. This is very much welcomed. This post will work closely with the short life working group, and we expect they will play a key role in setting out how the Council will immediately move to improve the current staffing levels at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce and James Gillespie's High School.

Other immediate steps can be taken that will help to address this, for example through:

- Innovation with staff recruitment and retention, taking forward ideas previously discussed but never implemented, and accepting that GME recruitment requires a different approach from EME.
- Creating a solid strategic plan for growth that demonstrates to GME teachers the Council's commitment to GME, and shows evidence that they can expect career progression in Edinburgh.

The short life working group should be given the resource necessary to address these critical issues.

### **Informal Consultation**

This interim report has been prepared in the wake of the informal consultation that took place relating to the Council's own draft proposal to relocate secondary GME. The manner of that informal consultation was not satisfactory.

The informal consultation did not provide sufficient clarity to all parties that the draft proposal was produced by Edinburgh Council, and was not the suggestion of the GME

community. The negative language and attitudes to GME and the Gaelic language as a result of this lack of clarity had a deep effect on our community. To address the resulting lack of trust and confidence that is felt by GME parents, it is vital that the actions identified in this report, and the actions contained in Edinburgh Council's Gaelic Language Plan 2018-22, are delivered with urgency.

When proposals within the informal consultation caused anxiety and uncertainty for families at Drummond Community High School and its feeder primary schools, Councillors acted swiftly to provide those families with an assurance that their educational pathway would be guaranteed. It is important that GME children receive parity of esteem and the same assurances of certainty of educational pathway. Equal respect for Gaelic speakers is enshrined in the law, and we must provide GME children with equal treatment with their EME peers.

### **JGHS Rising Rolls**

We welcome the creation of the JGHS rising rolls working group, which will look at solving the capacity issue holistically, involving all the feeder primaries and the school community. In order to sustainably achieve the aspirations set out in this report and in more depth in the GLP, Edinburgh Council needs to be working to a minimum strategic five-year plan of growth and consolidation for GME at James Gilliespie's High School, whilst planning for the delivery of a long-term secondary GME solution that provides increased educational benefit for our children. This will require investment and the right leadership.

### **Finance**

The interim report indicates that business cases will be put forward for additional investment required to implement the planned actions.

Edinburgh's GME children are part of the school estate in our city, they are the children of taxpaying Edinburgh residents, and their school accommodation and school staffing is the responsibility of the local authority. The expansion in infrastructure required for GME should be considered within the context of the significant infrastructure projects required to meet rising rolls across the city.

Consideration should also be given to the additional funding streams from Scottish Government which GME can access. Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce was refurbished with a significant grant of over £2m from the Gaelic Schools Capital Fund, and is now a full school which houses around 400 children. Glasgow has recently received a grant of £1.8m towards its third Gaelic primary.

Edinburgh Council also benefits from an annual Gaelic Specific Grant of several hundred thousand pounds. Additional grants may be available on an ad hoc basis for projects which demonstrate Gaelic development.

### **Other EC&F Reports**

During the course of this committee, other reports will be considered on the following:

7.5 teacher recruitment

7.7 additional support for learning and special schools

7.12 expansion of early learning and childcare from 600-1140 hours by 2020

It is disappointing that GME is not even mentioned in two of these reports (7.7 additional support for learning and 7.12 expansion of early learning), while the third (7.5 teacher recruitment) doesn't acknowledge the specific challenges faced by GME. We are particularly disappointed that the report indicates that there are to be no GME secondary probationers.

GME should be included and specifically referenced in reports dealing with these issues, including specific actions that may be required to address these issues in a GME context. We ask that these reports be amended to include specific responses to GME.

We welcome the creation of the post of Service Manager referenced in the teacher recruitment report (7.5 – 3.10 (p4)), which will focus on developing and delivering GME 0-18. This position will be charged with recruiting GME teachers. We welcome the decision to provide GME with a dedicated lead on this work to establish initiatives that will meet the specific challenges that exist for GME.

While we welcome proposals to expand nursery provision using a partner provider, there is already a shortage of available space at nursery, and this will become more acute when funded hours are doubled. The omission of Gaelic and GME from these reports does not inspire confidence that the council is delivering on commitments of equality for Gaelic.

## **Conclusion**

The interim report makes commitments to significant steps forward. We acknowledge the commitment to develop and deliver a strategy for the future of GME (from 0-18) in August 2018. We would like to thank Cllr Dickie, Gaelic Champion, and the members of the Gaelic Implementation Group, for their work in supporting the vision that we have for GME.

The strategy that is delivered in August must demonstrate a bold commitment to creating a culture within the Council that promotes Gaelic as part of Edinburgh life, and that the City is promoted as an attractive destination for teachers and associated staff to come to develop their careers in GME. We are confident that the creation of a strategic plan for Edinburgh which utilises strong partnerships between Councillors, officers, families and educational experts will result in Edinburgh becoming recognised as a place of best practice in the development and delivery of GME.

The direction of travel outlined in this report is reflective of the aspirations of the GME community. However, there are more than 750 children in GME in Edinburgh, and they are depending on us to get it right for their education, not in a strategy document, but in practice, in their places of education today. There is an urgent need:

- to improve the current provision of GME with immediate effect,
- to commit to a minimum five-year period of strategic growth at James Gilliespie's High School to provide a strong foundation to support the development of GME and,
- to be in a position in August to start a proper discussion about realistic solutions to the longer term issues of housing the enhanced secondary provision.

We look forward to the publication of the strategic plan for the growth and development of GME from 0-18 in August 2018, and the commitment to implementing it, enabling all of us,

parents, carers, staff, and pupils alike, to work together to build a sustainable future for GME in Scotland's capital city.

Appendix One:

For reference: [Summary of Parents' Views on Secondary Gaelic-medium education](#)