

## Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann): Primary and Early Years Group Report to AGM: 22 May 2019

### Primary: Current Provision and Issues

Since its establishment, Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce has seen its numbers rise and is now approaching its capacity. Edinburgh Council has published its own projected figures which show that this may happen by 2022.<sup>1</sup>

	Capacity	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Projected School Rolls	434	409	428	429	444	455	445	450

It is not clear that Edinburgh Council's projections account for the notable increase in P1 intakes over the last couple of years. If that continues and, based on continued demand for GME nursery provision, we have no reason to think it will not, we may see capacity reached even earlier.

Edinburgh Council has acknowledged the problem and its Gaelic Medium Education Improvement Plan and Growth Strategy (2018) seeks to provide a second GME primary school, with the GIG having discussed the possibility of the Darroch annexe in Tollcross as a potential solution. These talks are welcome, and will address not just the demand that currently exists, but also potential new demand that we expect would arise from having a second school in another part of the city. However, the implication is that this site would not be available until a dedicated GME secondary school is built i.e. 2024, and even then may require further refurbishment.

This gives rise to a number of issues for us to address:

- As rolls continue to rise, the challenge to recruit and retain qualified staff also increases. This will be exacerbated when another school is up and running.
- We cannot wait until 2024 for a solution to rising rolls- we need a short to medium term plan to ensure we do not turn children and families away from GME in the interim period.
- We need to consider the location, facilities and other criteria that should be used in determining what we want from a second GME primary.

### Pre-school: Current Provision and Issues

We consider pre-school to be a vital stage in GME: it helps to prepare children for learning in a language in which they may have little or no prior knowledge and allows them to develop familiarity with the primary school to ease transition.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20256/school\\_places/1551/school\\_roll\\_projections](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20256/school_places/1551/school_roll_projections)

The sgoil-àraich (GME nursery) is on the same site as the primary school and caters for 80 pre-school children aged 3+. They currently offer morning or afternoon places (not full day) for 16 hours per week. Parents can also apply for four longer morning slots (Mon-Thurs) to make up the 16 hours. It is not clear how many children miss out on a place each year and whether these children, and their families, are lost to GME in the longer term.

The importance of nursery provision to the success of GME has been discussed at GIG, as has the opening of another facility to accompany a new primary school. However, as with the situation with primary provision, this means that the question of meeting demand in the short-term remains unanswered. Furthermore, this is likely to be exacerbated as annual entitlement for ELC increases from 600 to 1140 hours next year.

The increase in hours will also create a challenge in dealing with a range of attendance patterns but, perhaps more fundamentally, in terms of recruiting additional qualified and Gaelic-speaking staff. We know that there will be a new Gaelic-speaking Early Years Assistant from August 2019. It is unclear if any Gaelic speakers have applied for the Modern Apprenticeship course although they have agreed to take Gaelic speaking high school students on weekly placement.

Òganan Dhùn Èideann (see section on wraparound care below) has recently become a “partner provider” to Edinburgh Council, providing early learning and childcare (ELC) to up to ten 3 and 4 year olds. These children can access the 600 hours of funded ELC that pre-school aged children are entitled to by attending 0830 – 1140, five mornings per week. It should be investigated whether the expansion of Òganan could help meet the demand for nursery places, e.g. through the opening of another site close to any proposed new GME primary.

### Wraparound Care: Current Provision and Issues

Gaelic-medium wraparound and after school care is provided onsite by Òganan Dhùn Èideann, a privately owned childcare provider. It operates a breakfast club, a morning wraparound session, a lunch club, an afternoon wraparound session and an after school club. It also runs a holiday club during some of the school holidays.

The service is registered to provide a care service to a maximum of 96 children at any one time, aged from three years up to and including P7 children, of whom no more than 31 children are not yet attending primary school. From 11.30am until 12.35pm the service may be provided to 48 children who are not yet attending primary school.

A survey of parents carried out by the Taobh na Pàirce Parent Council wraparound working group in 2017 indicated that the availability of on-site, Gaelic-medium wraparound care is essential to parents in order for them to be able to access GME for their children. This was particularly true for working parents of pre-school aged children, for whom it would be very difficult to exercise their choice to attend the sgoil-àraich at Taobh na Pàirce without the availability of suitable wraparound care.

In addition to the provision of wraparound care, which is vitally important to the growth of GME, Òganan Dhùn Èideann also contributes to the fabric of Edinburgh's Gaelic community in a number of ways:

- It is the largest employer of Gaelic speakers in the city, providing an environment for the language to be used and to thrive in an everyday setting;
- It provides a Gaelic-language volunteering/work experience opportunity for GME high school students, in conjunction with James Gillespie's High School, thereby providing an environment for Edinburgh's young Gaelic speakers to improve their fluency by using the language outside of the classroom;
- It provides additional exposure to the Gaelic language to those children who do not benefit from hearing Gaelic at home (the Òganan homework club is a specific example of this), and provides an opportunity for all children to use Gaelic outside the classroom;
- It acts as a supportive stepping stone for future GME early years assistants/teachers, primary school teachers and high school teachers, which is imperative if Edinburgh is to "grow its own" in order to supply sufficient number of qualified staff to satisfy current and future requirements in GME.

The service is well-used with waiting lists for the after school club session on three of the five weekdays. A recent survey of parents carried out by Òganan also indicated high levels of satisfaction with the service. As numbers rise in the school, and the nursery operates at capacity, demand for these services has increased over the years, and also created extra pressure for classroom space. As such, one major concern would be whether Òganan will be able to continue to operate onsite beyond 2019/20, and the impact moving it to another location would have.

#### Questions for GIG

- Are Edinburgh Council's school roll projections for Taobh na Pàirce too conservative? Are they taking into account the evidence of increasing popularity?
- How will Edinburgh Council make a decision on the suitability of any school?
- Is the assumption that Darroch will be available as a second primary from 2024 at the latest or are can other sites be considered?
- Is Edinburgh Council confident of meeting existing best practice in the school specification? E.g. outside space, acoustics, access by active travel and public transport? (Acoustics have proven to be an issue at Taobh na Pàirce and need to be considered at all future sites)
- What assumptions are going to be made on the required size for second primary?
- What assumptions are going to be made on the required size for additional early years facilities?
- What can be put in place to ensure the bun-sgoil and sgoil-àraich can meet rising roll numbers when capacity is reached before a second primary is ready? Is there scope to relocate some classes a nearby site as an interim solution?
- In order to calculate how many children we may be losing to GME, can we know what the total number of sgoil-àraich applicants are and the number of those that

get offered / accept a place? How many children enter the school (at any level) without previous attendance at sgoil-àraich?

- What will be the impact (of 1140 hours per year) increase in Early Years provision requirements and what steps have Edinburgh Council made to accommodate expansion?
- Does Edinburgh Council fully appreciate and acknowledge the importance of Gaelic-medium on-site wraparound care in the context of GME, considering the large geographical catchment of the school, both in terms of current GME families and in terms of the projected growth of GME in Edinburgh?
- Does Edinburgh Council fully appreciate the contribution of Gaelic-medium wraparound care to the fabric of Edinburgh's Gaelic community and to the supply of future GME early years assistants and teaching staff, in addition to its main role as a childcare provider?
- How is Edinburgh Council planning to manage classroom space requirements at the school over the coming years, in order to ensure that wraparound care provision remains on site, as per the commitment provided to the parent council wraparound working group to this effect in 2017?
- Has Edinburgh Council considered a potential role for a partner provider in the expansion of GME ELC, both in terms of the increase in hours from 600 to 1140 by 2020/21 and in terms of the provision of GME ELC in a location that is more readily accessible to families who do not live in the north of the city?
- How does Edinburgh Council plan to co-ordinate the establishment of expanded GME ELC and GME primary provision? Would CEC consider the establishment of GME ELC at new location in advance of new primary school, to act as nucleus of children who would transition from ELC to the lower years of a newly established primary school?
- Will the new GME primary school need to have a parent council formed in advance of its opening date, in order to review tenders for the provision of wraparound care, similar to the arrangement at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce?

#### Other questions being considered by the group

- Assuming the impact of doubling of hours will reduce capacity at sgoil-àraich or Òganán, more children will enter the school who are likely to have less Gaelic.
  - What will be the impact on children who have had some Gaelic – has this been measured before?
  - Could the standard of children who have had other preschool providers be improved with 'Gaelic as a foreign language' type teaching e.g. a roaming teacher providing provision in multiple locations?
  - Can information be obtained on the principal pre-schools that children have attended other than sgoil-àraich or Òganán to allow this effort to be targeted to maximise benefits<sup>2</sup>?

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<sup>2</sup> There are circa 5 children in 2018 /19 P1 from Cowgate- we believe more are coming to P1 next year and that they have already done Spanish (and possibly French) as a foreign language.

- Can the Education group coordinate any information regarding the current residential areas of children in Gaelic medium information in Edinburgh e.g. ward or postcode area?
- Is there any information on the number of families that attend Croileagan that don't go on to attend sgoil-àraich and the school? Any feedback on why?
- How do we create awareness involve parents in discussions on all these key issues, including those with children not yet attending bun-sgoil or sgoil-àraich? Flyering and word of mouth should be considered as this worked well for the response to Gaelic Language Plan?
- How can we as a working group monitor staff resourcing? (Can the school help or is CnPDE better placed to ask the council?)
  - Is the attraction, retention and support of GME teachers something we should lobby for from both Edinburgh Council and Scottish Government?
  - Does this include language assistants?