



cnpduneideann@gmail.com

By email

Shirley-Anne Somerville  
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills  
Scottish Government

26 May 2021

Shirley-Anne Somerville a charaid

**Re. City of Edinburgh Council Consultation on Gaelic Medium Education Secondary School**

You will be aware that the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) is due to consider proceeding to a statutory consultation around opening a new Gaelic Medium Education Secondary School in Liberton. The CEC Education, Children and Families Committee (due to meet on the 28 May 2021) will consider a recommendation to proceed to statutory consultation on the closure of GME at James Gillespie's High School from 2025 and opening of a new GME Secondary School on a shared site with Liberton High School.

The SNP Manifesto 2021 made detailed and specific reference and commitments around GME in Edinburgh. Parents, carers, the Parent Councils and Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann & Lodainn) would welcome clarity around the meaning of these commitments, quoted below, to ensure informed decisions are made concerning proposals for the future of GME in Edinburgh:

*We will support the development of additional GME primary schools in Edinburgh and the Lothians as an important step towards the creation of a standalone GME secondary school in central Edinburgh.*

*A central location is necessary to ensure it is accessible from major public transport hubs to allow the new standalone school to serve the wider Lothian region.*

*ECC has taken forward important engagement on GME provision, but we will ensure that this is now incorporated within a new national strategic approach.*

Of specific importance to parents and carers will be a full explanation around the SNP's understanding of 'standalone GME secondary school' and 'a central location', and how this reflects the new national strategic approach.

We would like to invite you to attend a meeting with GME parents and carers in June to explain how the Government feels the CEC proposal for Liberton aligns with the manifesto commitment and to set out the 'New national strategic approach' to GME. We are concerned that proceeding to consultation without exploring the specific issues raised by the manifesto risks the consultation process itself.

We remain committed to working with the Council. However, with the future of GME in Edinburgh at stake, we feel clarity is required from Scottish Government and the SNP around their manifesto commitments to ensure parents can make fully informed decisions around the future of GME in Edinburgh.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further at your earliest convenience.

Le gach deagh dhùrachd,

Sharon May

Convenor  
Comann nam Pàrant  
(Dùn Èideann & Lodainn)

Copy to  
Shona MacLennan, CEO, Bòrd na Gàidhlig  
Gayle Gorman, CEO, Education Scotland  
Ben Macpherson, MSP



cnpduneideann@gmail.com

By email

Shirley-Anne Somerville  
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills  
Scottish Government

1 June 2021

Shirley-Anne Somerville a charaid

### **Re. City of Edinburgh Consultation on Gaelic Medium Education Secondary School**

I am writing to update you on the outcome of the City of Edinburgh Council's Education, Children and Families Committee (ECF) which was held on 28 May 2021. Comann nam Pàrant - Dùn Èideann & Lodainn (CnP) provided a deputation and submitted a short written report. At the meeting the Committee agreed:

- The Convenor of ECF Committee should write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to seek confirmation as to whether the proposal outlined in the draft statutory consultation paper aligns with the government's new national strategic approach for the growth of Gaelic Medium Education particularly in relation to the commitment to create a standalone secondary school in the centre of Edinburgh.
- The Convener reports back to the next ECF Committee meeting on 24 August 2021 on the outcome of these discussions before taking a decision on proceeding to the Statutory Consultation.

We specifically asked the Council to defer making a decision on proceeding to statutory consultation until the August meeting, in the expectation that after discussion with yourself and officials there should be greater clarity around the SNP manifesto commitments and how the council's plan aligns to the new national strategy for GME.

During the ECF meeting we underlined the lack of clarity around the Council's plans and their alignment to manifesto commitments and the new national strategy. We remain concerned that proceeding to consultation without exploring the specific issues raised by the manifesto risks the consultation process itself.

We would suggest that you could engage with a small group of parents, including representatives from CnP and the Parent Council of Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce to discuss these issues and hear directly from parents and carers in advance of providing your response to the Convenor of the ECF Committee. CnP would be happy to facilitate such a meeting.

If you are receptive to the suggestion for a small meeting, we can liaise with your officials and progress planning for a date in June.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Le gach deagh dhùrachd,

Sharon May

Convenor  
Comann nam Pàrant  
(Dùn Èideann & Lodainn)

Copy to  
Shona MacLennan, CEO, Bòrd na Gàidhlig  
Gayle Gorman, CEO, Education Scotland  
Ben Macpherson, MSP



cnpduneideann@gmail.com

By email

Shirley-Anne Somerville  
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills  
Scottish Government

9 June 2021

Case numbers: 202100207665 and 202100210443

Shirley-Anne Somerville a charaid

**Re. Briefing Paper on a Gaelic Medium High School for Edinburgh**

We are writing to you to provide additional information on GME in Edinburgh. Please find attached a briefing paper which covers the background, the current proposal, the manifesto promise and its effects, and suggested next steps.

We would be grateful if you could take the time to appraise this short document and to attend a meeting with parents to discuss.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Le gach deagh dhùrachd,

Sharon May

Convenor  
Comann nam Pàrant  
(Dùn Èideann & Lodainn)

Copy to  
Douglas Ansell, Scottish Government  
Stuart Pescodd, Scottish Government  
Gayle Gorman, CEO, Education Scotland  
Ben Macpherson, MSP  
Shona MacLennan, CEO, Bòrd na Gàidhlig

## **Briefing paper on a Gaelic Medium High School for Edinburgh**

### **Background**

The current attempt to find the best solution for a Gaelic Medium High School in Edinburgh is the latest stage in a process that has been ongoing since the decision to open Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce in 2011.

Comann nam Pàrant has continually requested the development of a strategy for the development of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) from 0-18 years across the city, a strategy that puts education at its heart. This strategy has not been forthcoming, with the Council prioritising the rising rolls issue ahead of the need to develop a coherent approach to the development of GME.

However, the pressure of rising rolls at James Gillespie's High School has created the momentum for the Council to establish a Gaelic Medium High School in the city and we have been working with the Council to find a solution.

### **The current proposal**

Following the collapse of the Drummond proposal in 2017/2018, the Council undertook, at a meeting with parents in 2019, to carry out an analysis of four potential sites for a Gaelic Medium High School - two standalone and two co-located. The process by which these four sites were identified and what other sites were considered is not clear to us, but parents were given the impression that a genuinely strategic options appraisal would be carried out. At a further meeting in January 2020, however, it was clear that Liberton was now the Council's preferred option.

The main reason given for this was "deliverability", a concept which was explained by reference to the cost of foregoing development opportunities at other sites and the availability of Scottish Government funding. Unfortunately, what is seen by some parents as a weak analysis of the initially-presented options has eroded parental confidence in the process. Doubts have been expressed as to whether the Council's strategy has any rational basis other than addressing the JGHS rising rolls issue in time and avoiding the consequences of a failure to plan for the financial demands of expanded GME.

Council representatives considered that Gaelic immersion could be achieved at any site. For that reason, questions of best practice for minority language provision played little or no role in the case for the Liberton site. No developed explanation of how immersion would be achieved or how a "Gaelic Language Bubble" would be protected was offered. Free public transport travel for secondary pupils was thought to address any concerns about accessibility of the site. (This was later supplemented by the offer of direct buses from Taobh na Pàirce.) Parents' concerns regarding the Liberton site focussed on three inter-related issues: the effect on Gaelic immersion of a shared campus; the vulnerability of a small GME school community sharing facilities with a much larger EME

school and the peripheral location of the site on the opposite side of the city to the existing primary.

### **The manifesto promise and its effect**

The SNP manifesto commitment to “a standalone school in central Edinburgh” thus focussed directly on the points of concern which were most salient amongst the parent body. Before the election, 18% of parents supported the Liberton proposal with 41% opposing and 41% unsure and seeking more information from the council. The offer of a school that directly met with the parents’ long-established vision and priorities for a Gaelic Medium High School has been widely welcomed and has deepened the view that Liberton is not the solution that the manifesto presented being the best option for Edinburgh and the Lothians. An apparent retreat from the manifesto commitment since the election risks further embedding cynicism and lack of trust regarding political will for the support of GME and the Gaelic language.

Further, uncertainty about the Scottish Government’s intentions with regard to GME in Edinburgh has prevented City of Edinburgh Council from developing its own position. This puts additional pressure on an already tight timetable.

### **What is needed**

In light of all this, clarity about the nature of the additional support to which the Scottish Government considers itself bound in light of its manifesto commitment is needed as a matter of urgency. Furthermore, we suggest that you meet with parents to explain the nature of the Scottish Government's offer and reassure them about the Government’s commitment to supporting Gaelic language and education in the nation’s capital.



cnpduneideann@gmail.com  
By email

Shirley-Anne Somerville  
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills  
Scottish Government

28 June 2021

Case numbers 202100207665 and 202100210443

Shirley-Anne Somerville a charaid

**Re: meeting with Julien Kramer, Interim Director of Education at City of Edinburgh Council**

We are writing to update you on our recent meeting with Julien Kramer, Interim Director of Education at City of Edinburgh Council, which was held 25 June 2021 to discuss the statutory consultation for a Gaelic High School in Edinburgh. Here, we highlighted the significant and continuous concerns around the statutory consultation: lack of clear process and leadership, lack of strategy at local and national level, issues around the Liberton proposal itself (lack of clear communication and demonstrable experience in delivering a project of this scale, along with little understanding of the variety of needs and experiences of families) and the confusion created by the apparent alternative offer suggested by the SNP manifesto pledge. Due to these issues, we have strongly urged Julien Kramer to delay the date of the statutory consultation which is currently scheduled for 24 August 2021.

On 28 May 2021, Comann nam Pàrant made a verbal and written deputation at the Education, Children and Families Committee meeting held by City of Edinburgh Council. Our written deputation (attached) highlights the range of concerns regarding the current proposal for a Gaelic Medium High School for Edinburgh. It also emphasises the need for the SNP to provide clarity around their manifesto pledge, to articulate how the support for a 'stand-alone GME secondary school in the centre of Edinburgh' and 'a general presumption against co-locating GME schools with English medium schools' aligns with the proposal for a joint campus at Liberton.

We have also written to you on three occasions:



26 May 2021, City of Edinburgh Council Consultation on Gaelic Medium Education Secondary School, case number 202100207665

31 May 2021, Follow up - City of Edinburgh Council Consultation on Gaelic Medium Education Secondary School, case number 202100210443

9 June 2021, Briefing Paper on a Gaelic Medium High School for Edinburgh, case numbers: 202100207665 and 202100210443

We write again to stress the urgency of the issue. City of Edinburgh Council have asked their Convenor to write to you to seek confirmation on whether the proposal outlined in the draft statutory consultation paper (attached) aligns with the government's new national strategic approach for the growth of Gaelic Medium Education, particularly in relation to the commitment to create a standalone secondary school in the centre of Edinburgh. The Convener reports back to the Education, Children and Families Committee on 24 August 2021 on the outcome of these discussions before proceeding to the Statutory Consultation.

Parents and carers are entitled to make informed choices regarding their children's education. Your recent statement in support of the Liberton proposal has caused significant confusion and concern, creating an environment in which many families feel unable to assess the proposal. Until there is clear and sufficiently detailed information from the Scottish Government which directly and adequately addresses the issues raised by the SNP manifesto, the statutory consultation process itself is at risk. Without such clarity on this issue, parents and carers will be unable to participate in one of the most significant decisions around Gaelic Medium Education in Edinburgh in recent years.

We look forward to your response dealing with the issues set out in this and our previous letters.

Le gach deagh dhùrachd

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann is Lodainn)



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Sharon May  
cnpduneideann@gmail.com

Our Reference: 202100211823  
Your Reference: Gaelic Education in Edinburgh

15 July 2021

Dear Ms May,

Thank you for your email of 27 May and subsequent updates regarding the proposals by Edinburgh City Council for Gaelic provision at Liberton and the SNP manifesto commitments.

The Scottish Government has a strong commitment to the Gaelic language and our aim is to see an increase in the numbers speaking, using and learning the language. In support of this aim, the Government's is ambitious and keen to demonstrate our resolve to create a sustainable future for the language throughout Scotland, not least through our commitment to a GME secondary school in Edinburgh. We recognise that the City of Edinburgh Council and the parents who wish Gaelic medium education for their children have a key role to play and contribution to make in achieving this.

We are aware that Edinburgh Council also has ambitious plans for the future delivery of Gaelic medium education in the city. In this, it is essential that the Council proceeds with a clear understanding of the wishes of Gaelic medium parents. Having taken parental views into account it will be for the City of Edinburgh to consider options and to proceed to consultation following the process contained in the Schools (Consultation) Act 2010.

Throughout this process the Scottish Government is keen to work closely with the Council, to offer support where possible and to ensure good progress is made both with SG commitments and CEC ambitions. Our shared aim must be to promote and support Gaelic medium education within the city and to ensure that the high quality of provision continues to be attractive to parents in the Edinburgh area.

I would ask that parents continue to engage with Edinburgh Council as they develop their proposals.

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)

Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh [www.lobbying.scot](http://www.lobbying.scot)



I hope that this clarifies the position.

Yours sincerely



**SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE**

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