

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann & Lodainn)

Written Report to Education, Children and Families Committee

Friday 28 May 2021 at 9am

Agenda item 4a) Gaelic Medium Education in Edinburgh – Statutory Consultation

Gaelic Medium Education in Edinburgh began through a small group of parents and children setting up a Pàrant is Pàisde playgroup and campaigning over many years for formal education in Gaelic to be introduced in the city. From that campaign, came the establishment of the GME primary unit and sgoil-àraich at Tollcross from 1988, followed by the creation of a successful and fast-expanding stand-alone primary school at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce in 2013. This has been accompanied by the flourishing of cròileagan groups across the city, bringing more and more families into GME. These developments have been achieved through the hard work and dedication of many people in cròileagan groups, in schools and in the Gaelic community, as well as by support garnered at Council and national level. Such accomplishments have come to fruition due to the energy and dedication of longstanding and ongoing parental campaigns which have driven and underpinned the expansion of GME in Edinburgh, as they have elsewhere in Scotland. Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann & Lodainn) has been representing and supporting families throughout this period in our goals of establishing, maintaining and developing Gaelic Medium Education in the city. Now, in working towards a Gaelic-medium High School for Edinburgh, we continue advocate for families throughout their journey in GME.

We have listened to the voices of parents, teachers and our children, and together we have collaborated in creating a vision for the development of a GME High School for Edinburgh. That is, a much enhanced and improved Gaelic-medium experience for our children at secondary school level, one which ensures a greater percentage of the timetable to be delivered through the medium of Gaelic. We seek a growing Gaelic-medium community at secondary level, and the vision of this community staying together in one school.

Families require a successful secondary school provision which prioritises delivering a high-quality education in a well-managed school, with a broad range of subjects and extra-curricular activities offered, along with full support for learning. We strive for an enhanced Gaelic immersion experience for our children with the aim of producing confident and fluent adult speakers.

The criteria set by families are: that any location should support the educational aims of high-quality education within a Gaelic immersion environment and should provide a permanent home for GME secondary, that the specific needs of a city-wide catchment need to be carefully considered, and that design and environment play a large part in successful education.

This vision and these priorities – established and verified through open and repeated consultation with all GME families – remain the core principles guiding Comann nam Pàrant and the families we represent. They provide the framework through which we have engaged with the process set out by the Council, including the informal consultation in 2020 and the outcome report published in 2021.

The SNP's manifesto¹ reflects the vision and priorities of GME families for the future of GME. The manifesto states:

“Gaelic Medium Education (GME) is a key driver for ensuring that Gaelic continues to thrive and grow in both rural and urban areas. GME education is at its most successful when it is a fully immersive experience for pupils, and when an entire school career can be delivered through the medium of

¹ [SNP Manifesto 2021](#)

Gaelic.

To ensure that the GME experience is truly immersive we will have a general presumption against co-locating GME schools with English medium schools.

We will encourage the creation of new GME primary and secondary schools across Scotland, backed by investment to increase the number of teachers who can teach in the medium of Gaelic. This will be with a view to strengthening the range of subjects that can be taught in GME for both a broad general education and in the senior phase of secondary school.

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.

Edinburgh City Council has taken forward important engagement on GME provision, but we will ensure that this is now incorporated within a new national strategic approach. This is essential if we are to see the faster rates of progress we seek for Gaelic."

The SNP pledge offered parents and carers a centrally-located, dedicated stand-alone GME High School, a result for which families have long advocated. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to expect parents to support the vision set out by the SNP in their manifesto which so closely reflects the vision and priorities laid out by parents over the last five years.

We are keen to see the new national strategic approach proposed by Scottish Government in the SNP's recent manifesto and how this fits with Edinburgh Council's strategy for the development of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) across the City. This is especially pressing given the recent statement made by Shirley-Anne Somerville, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, in which she stated that '[City of Edinburgh Council] have presented an excellent option at Liberton High and one that serves the community very well.' We are keen to understand how the co-located Liberton option aligns with the SNP's pledge of a stand-alone central school, and await further clarification.

In our response to the Council's informal consultation, Comann nam Pàrant's report² highlighted specific areas of concern:

- the impact on language immersion
- the proposed location
- the need for careful and detailed planning
- the recruitment and retention of teaching staff
- the impact on the S1 and S2 cohort

We welcome the Council's consideration of these parental concerns and look forward to further discussion and details about the new primary provision, including clarification on the future of Darroch, the rationale for the catchment areas and an assessment of the proposals for active travel and transport to the various school sites for the GME community.

However, there are substantial issues which remain unresolved and which, without solutions, will continue to create significant barriers for parents. We require detailed plans about recruitment and retention of teaching staff that can deliver on the ambitions set out by the Council. We request further detail on the proposed curriculum offer and how the Council plans to provide a depth and

² [Comann nam Pàrant \(Dùn Èideann & Lodainn\) Submission to Informal Review for GME High School 11 December 2020](#)

breadth of curriculum from 2025 onwards, and clarity on if and how any GME High School utilises surrounding EME provision and e-Sgoil. We also seek clarity around the definition of 'stand-alone', a term now being used by the Council to describe the GME High School operating on a shared campus site.

In our survey in December 2020, 41% of respondents answered "no" and 41% of respondents answered "unsure" when asked if, from the information given to them by the Council, they felt that the current plan had the potential to achieve the successful delivery of GME at secondary level. The reasons given for the answers were consistent across these two groups and the most common concerns being:

- Co-location and the impact on language immersion were the most frequently cited
- Lack of planning and that this seemed a "rush" was the next most common comment from respondents. Concerns were around the lack of thoroughness in the planning, lack of data and the feeling that the Council are trying to rush this plan through to solve an estates problem.

When asked about the specific location, 51% said the location did not offer the scope to meet the priorities and criteria for the successful delivery of GME at secondary level and 34% were not sure. The shared campus was the most common concern (in terms of the quality of Gaelic immersion it offers and how the GME High School would integrate and engage with the EME school) followed by location (Liberton not being considered central, transport links not being adequate, and the distance from the existing primary school). We are aware that these results were taken from parents in December 2020, prior to the offer of transport from Taobh na Pàirce to the new GME High School at Liberton which was announced in the outcomes report and noted in the consultation by the Council. We acknowledge that this offer made by the Council is a move towards addressing one of the concerns (travel times) around the location.

However, there is more to do: significant concern remains around the inconsistent language used to describe the new school, with terms 'stand-alone', 'co-located' and 'shared campus' all appearing in descriptions of the new school. These mixed and unclear phrases do not help parents who are seeking clear information to make an informed choice. We ask the Council to articulate the proposal using consistent language and to define these terms so that families can fully understand the proposal that is being made.

Since the publication of the Outcome Report of the Informal Consultation Process on Proposals for Secondary Gaelic Medium Education in Edinburgh in March 2021 and the original scheduled Committee meeting in April, there was not sufficient time for Comann nam Pàrant to survey GME families in a way that would reflect whether parents' position has changed based on the additional information in the Council's latest document. Comann nam Pàrant is waiting for clarification from the SNP prior to issuing another survey to assess the current parental position.

However, it is clear from our engagement with GME families since March 2021 that for a significant proportion of parents/carers uncertainty remains about the suitability of this proposal. This uncertainty can only be overcome by the Council sharing information and involving parents in a more significant and structured way in the planning and development of GME at secondary level.

Comann nam Pàrant has requested, over many years, the development of a strategic plan for the growth of GME across the city that is driven by educational best practice for a city-wide catchment so that parents can identify the rationale for the decisions that are being made about their children's education. We see this as critical to the success of GME in the long term. Comann nam Pàrant requests that the Gaelic Learning Strategy – referred to in the Council's outcome report – is published as soon as possible so that families can fully understand how the proposal has been

developed to support the education of GME learners, and how this aligns with the broader strategic plan for the development of GME across the city and with the new national framework.

We recognise the importance of Gaelic leadership roles within the Council and would like to re-iterate that the Gaelic Development Officer (GDO) is crucial to the success of the development of a Gaelic High School: they must have a key role in the development of the plans operating from a position of deep knowledge and advocacy for GME, from which they can secure a path of engagement between parents and the Council and to act as a conduit for questions and concerns.

The Council have stated that the outcome report would “reflect the discussions, address all comments and questions received, and conclude which option(s) will be progressed to statutory consultation”. While the Council have reached their conclusion as to which option they wish to progress to statutory consultation, significant work needs to be done in reflecting the discussions and addressing all comments and concerns raised by families. It is only by achieving this that any proposal has the opportunity to be met with enthusiasm and result in success. We reiterate that robust information, clear communication and active engagement with families is vital to the success of any proposal brought forward by the Council.

In terms of the recommendations made by the Council to the Committee we would make the following comments:

1.1.1 We have seen no evidence in the informal consultation process that indicates a majority of parents would support the proposals at a statutory consultation. Indeed, it is clear that a number of parents would actively oppose it. Given this, we cannot support the Council's preferred proposal going forward to statutory consultation.

1.1.2 We support the Convenor attempting to obtain clarification from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. Comann nam Pàrant has done likewise and has written to the Secretary in order to gain clarity on the manifesto pledge and to underline how these recent commitments have been enthusiastically received by parents, how this has an impact on the Council's proposals, and to push for Scottish Government's involvement in finding a satisfactory resolution.

1.1.3 We accept a decision on statutory consultation being delayed to August 2021 (the comments in 1.1.1 notwithstanding). However, we believe that continued contact with parents in the interim period is critical. The Council must discuss issues such as the curriculum offer, transition and immersion, all which will be of a concern wherever the school is located, and which would be useful in continuing to support parents and their families towards a solution that meets the best educational outcomes for their children.

The growth of GME in Edinburgh has accelerated significantly, especially at secondary level, over the last few years. We would like to extend our thanks to the staff teams at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce and James Gillespie's High School, along with Council Officers and Councillors for their support in achieving this. We appreciate that the work done to achieve the current improved position has been undertaken by all Council administrations and recognise the cross-party support that Gaelic Medium Education continues to receive.

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann & Lodainn) will continue to work closely with the Council during what continues to be an exciting period of growth and expansion for GME in the city. GME families are committed to taking a collaborative approach towards securing a successful outcome for the education of our children. We look forward to working closely with the Council in securing a permanent home for GME at secondary level and an expanded provision at primary and early years.

We will continue to work together in achieving this ambition, ensuring it is one which reflects the vision and priorities of families, recognises Gaelic language and culture as an integral part of a connected, inspired, fair and thriving city³, and – above all – keeps the education and wellbeing of children at its heart.

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann & Lodainn)

27.05.2021

³ [City of Edinburgh Council, Edinburgh Gaelic Language Plan 2018-22](#)