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By email

Alison is Iain còire

**Re: GME Education - City of Edinburgh**

Many thanks for sharing your most recent letter to Shirley-Anne Somerville, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, regarding proposals for the new GME high school, along with Cabinet Secretary's letter to City of Edinburgh Council from earlier in the month.

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann is Lodainn) very much welcomes the transparent communication from the Council as well as your ongoing collaboration with the Scottish Government in this urgent issue. We do, however, wish to raise concerns around the content of the correspondence, and we list these below. We also include recommendations which we hope will create an opportunity for the Council to collaborate with GME families more fruitfully at this critical time.

We understand that you plan to bring a report to the Education, Children and Families Committee on 7 December 2021 which identifies sites, outlines costs and offers an appraisal of each option. We ask that you do not seek approval from the Committee to consider starting the statutory consultative process. Instead, we request that you take the time to prepare and present detailed pre-consultation information, to communicate and engage with families in a more substantial way, and to fully address the concerns which have been raised by Comann nam Pàrant in the past year.

**Timescales**

Your letter cited 'accommodation pressures at James Gillespie's High School' as a potential factor in determining the timescales for a GME high school. However, as parents we believe that the timeline for a new GME high school should be based on ensuring the best possible outcome for the generations of pupils this new school will serve. GME pupils are entitled to a GME high school which reflects the priorities and criteria that have been established and verified through open and repeated consultation with all GME families.

The need for a GME high school should not be conflated with the rising rolls at James Gillespie's High School: the two issues are distinct. GME pupils should not be removed from James Gillespie's High School as an attempt to mitigate the problem of rising rolls, nor should pupil numbers at JGHS be a determining factor in the timeline for the creation of a new GME high school.

### **Fettes site**

In terms of timescales, we note that Fettes has now been removed as an option as it will not be available in the timescale to which you are working. The Royal Victoria Hospital site, however, remains as a possible option despite having an impact on your original 2025 deadline. We seek further clarity as to why the Fettes site could not also be considered.

### **Royal Victoria Hospital site**

We seek clarification as to whether the Council would still seek approval at the committee meeting on 7 December 2021 to go to statutory consultation if there is not a response from the Scottish Government regarding the funding required for the Royal Victoria Hospital site.

### **Finance**

We are alarmed by the statement 'If the capital grant is not forthcoming then a GME secondary school, irrespective of the site, becomes undeliverable because the Council does not have the capital funding to deliver a GME secondary school by itself.' This suggests an astonishing lack of planning in terms of budgeting for the development of GME in Edinburgh and the Lothians. We ask that the Council provide more information around this: if the Council have included the cost of a GME high school at all within their own budget or if a new school is entirely dependent on financial support from the Scottish Government.

### **The Best Educational Option**

We understand the Council are of the opinion that the co-located Liberton site is 'the best educational option for the development of Gaelic'. However, it is not possible for families to agree with this view prior to any consultation. There is no detail available for a GME high school on any other site and therefore no comparison can be made at this stage.

In addition, we seek clarity on how 'best educational option' would be measured when making comparisons between sites. Here, we would also require information on how the Council plans to grow GME, such as progress in the recruitment and retention of Gaelic-speaking staff and increasing the proportion of the curriculum delivered through Gaelic. These are both current issues at James Gillespie's High School. GME families need to fully understand the way in which the Council is demonstrably committed to meeting the goal of immersion throughout the period of our children's Broad General Education (per Education Scotland: *Advice on Gaelic Education*, February 2015.)

We would also highlight again the SNP's manifesto which stated that '[to] ensure that the GME experience is truly immersive we will have a general presumption against co-locating

GME schools with English medium schools.’ It is unclear how the Council’s preferred option aligns with this approach.

## **Recommendations**

We recommend that the Council does not proceed with the statutory consultation. Instead, we urge the Council to undertake an informal consultation, publish pre-consultation information well in advance with robust data and clear criteria, share their Gaelic Learning Strategy, communicate and engage with parents, and provide an outcome report.

We also ask the Council to take into account the following:

1. Discussions with the Scottish Government on the option of a site to support a centrally located, stand-alone GME secondary school are ongoing. These need to be allowed adequate time to reach a conclusion.
2. We have entered a new academic year and new children have begun their journey in GME. As a result, the parent body to be consulted has changed since the last informal consultation.
3. Engagement with families is crucial. In order to achieve a successful outcome to the statutory consultation, the Council must first listen to the concerns of families (which many feel have not been addressed), and respond to these in turn with the detail and diligence required. A further period of informal consultation will provide the opportunity for this.

We also advise that the Council fully addresses the concerns and questions that Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann is Lodainn) raised in our deputation in May 2021, our informal submission in December 2020 and in correspondence both to the Council and to the Scottish Government in the past 12 months.

Pressing ahead without support from GME families would introduce real risk to the statutory consultation process. We encourage the Council to engage with families in a meaningful way to ensure the process is as vigorous, authentic and inclusive as possible. This is vital to the success of any proposal brought forward by the Council.

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann & Lodainn) is committed to working with the Council throughout the process. We would like to offer our support in exploring opportunities to increase engagement and communication with families so that we might work together to secure a successful outcome. We look forward to collaborating further in this significant venture of establishing a GME high school which meets the needs of young people and their families.

Leis gach deagh dhùrachd

Comann nam Pàrant  
(Dùn Èideann is Lodainn)