



SUMMARY REPORT

Meeting 25 March 2021

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Eideann & Lodainn) meeting with parents and carers to discuss City of Edinburgh Council's outcome report of the informal consultation process on Proposals for Secondary Gaelic Medium Education in Edinburgh.

As a result of a meeting in 2015 and reaffirmed at subsequent meetings over the years (particularly at a well-attended meeting on 20 March 2019), parents have identified the following vision for the development of a GME High School for Edinburgh:

1. Parents share the vision of a much enhanced and improved Gaelic-medium experience for our children at secondary school. This would include a greater percentage of the timetable to be delivered through the medium of Gaelic.
2. Parents share the vision of a growing Gaelic-medium community at secondary school, and the vision of this community staying together in one school.

With successful secondary provision delivering:

1. 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.
2. An enhanced Gaelic immersion experience as part of the above with an aim to produce confident and fluent adult speakers.

In terms of assessing the location and design, parents agreed the following:

1. 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.
2. In terms of geography, the specific needs of a city-wide catchment need to be carefully considered.
3. Design and environment play a large part in successful education, and this should be fully considered; alongside considerations of impact on wider environment.

As a result of the informal consultation, the Council received over 300 questions from parents. The Council's outcome report published on 19 March 2021 looked to address these questions and concerns.

Comann nam Pàrant held a meeting on 25 March 2021 to discuss the outcome report and to review the report.

- The meeting was hosted by Comann nam Pàrant via zoom on Thursday 25 March 2021 - 48 parents attended
- On Monday 12 April 2021, Comann nam Pàrant held a follow-up meeting for parents who had been unable to attend the evening meetign on 25 March – 8 parents attended
- There was representation from parents across the schools age range with classes 1-4 as the most well represented (see below)

What is the age(s) of your young person?

(Multiple choice as may have more than one child)

Cròilegan	4	4%
Sgoil-àraich	7	7%
C1	13	14%
C2	12	13%
C3	13	14%
C4	15	16%
C5	10	11%
C6	8	8%
C7	6	6%
Àrd-sgoil	7	7%
Total	95	100%

Areas of discussion

48 parents were split across three break out sessions on the 25 March and 8 across one break-out session on 12 April; each session covered the same topics. Discussion centred on re-examining the following question which had originally been posed as part of Comann nam Pàrant’s survey to assess parental response to the initial informal consultation report: *From the information you have been given, do you feel that the current plan has the potential to achieve the successful delivery of GME at secondary level?*

The following six areas were discussed:

1. Impact on language immersion
2. Location
3. Planning
4. Recruitment and retention of teaching staff
5. Impact on S1 and S2 cohort (could a second primary be established sooner)
6. Any other issues to be raised as a result of this report.

Overview of discussions

1. Impact on language immersion

Parents remain committed to the principle of immersion. Parents need to be confident that the level of Gaelic received by pupils at secondary level will be a significant improvement on what is currently offered.

Parents were broadly supportive of the approach to immersion as outlined in the report and the emphasis on school culture and ethos. However, parents are still seeking more detail on how the curriculum will be structured and how the curriculum will deliver a depth and breadth of subjects from 2025. What is the suggested use of eSgoil and how heavily will this be relied upon? Parents want to see more Gaelic subjects become available faster than currently predicted.

If parents are to commit to significant travel times to the new school, they need to be confident that the Council will deliver a high-quality education and an enhanced Gaelic immersion experience that justifies the time that children spend travelling to receive GME.

The Council have reduced the emphasis on the shared site and refer to the school as a 'standalone' in the report: how will this affect the design as it has been previously been shown? Will there still be shared facilities, if so what are these and how will this work? How will the council and staff team integrate the new GME High School with a significantly smaller cohort onto the already established school site. How will the design of the campus be affected by the proposal that the Gaelic school will effectively be a 3/5-18 school, at least in the medium term?

One parent raised the issue of acoustics in the new building and asked that the Council ensure these are up to code. It is well documented that poor acoustics have a detrimental effect on language acquisition and there has been a long-standing campaign by parents to improve those at Taobh na Pàirce which is ongoing. Parents seek assurances that acoustics in the new building will up to code, and that any existing space to be used for new GME schools/units will be retrofitted correctly and brought up to code.

Parents welcome the commitment to increasing the primary and early years provision to support the development of GME across the city but are concerned about the deliverability and sustainability of this, particularly considering the existing concerns about the levels of immersion at Taobh na Pàirce due to staff recruitment and retention.

Parents would like more detail on the development of the additional primary and early years sites and their proposed locations. The use of the word 'units' feels like a retrograde step in the establishment of GME within Edinburgh and it would be beneficial for them to be identified as schools with their own identities from the start.

2. Location

Some parents reject the location of Liberton for the GME secondary given that a high percentage of families live locally to Taobh na Pàirce.¹ In addition, equalities was raised as an issue: splitting the GME community between Taobh na Pàirce and Liberton potentially puts GME families at a disadvantage compared to other families whose children attend city-wide catchment schools who have their primary and secondary school provision sited closer together.

Some parents would like to see a full evaluation carried out with respect to where families live today, and strategically where families live in relation to the whole of Edinburgh. Population density, current and according to CEC's 2030 development plan needs to be a part of this evaluation in order to understand the suitability of the Liberton site to best serve the service user population and ensure equitable access for children from across the city.

¹ In 2019, Taobh na Pàirce undertook a travel survey of families. There were 206 respondents, representing 296 children. Over half the respondents (119) lived within 2 miles of Taobh na Pàirce. The total roll in 2019 was 424 pupils.

For some parents, they recognise that choosing a location is not as important as ensuring the school delivers high-quality GME in an enhanced Gaelic immersion environment.

Parents are concerned about the travel time. Some parents welcomed the proposal for a non-stop bus to be provided from the primary locations, but some parents had concerns about the practicalities of the service; questions were raised about how the bus service could accommodate after school activities etc. Parents also had reservations over the sustainability of this service over time.

Parents felt a more central location would provide greater potential for growth. Any location would now also need to be viewed in relation to the additional primary sites as well as the existing primary school.

Some parents felt that a central location would also provide a more equitable solution for families across the breadth of Edinburgh (and the Lothians). They also felt that a central location offers better transport links thus making a GME secondary education more accessible to all. Some parents felt that a central location, coupled with proximity to Bun-Sgoil Taobh na Pàirce (and any further primary sites) was the best option in terms of building the school community and supporting a stronger, more sustainable one.

Parents are disappointed that the full options appraisal for four sites has not be forthcoming, creating concern about the provision of GME in the medium term if the Liberton proposal is unsuccessful. In the assessment of Granton, it was considered reductive and unhelpful to pit housing against a school for land use at one particular site.

The addition of primary and early years provision at the Liberton site received a mixed response, mainly because it was unclear why this was now being proposed having not been considered a possibility at an earlier stage. Parents would like more information as to how this will work.

3. Planning

Parents have been consistent in requesting that the Council develop and deliver a plan that centres on educational best practice and outcomes for the children. There was a concern that these latest revisions feel rushed and not rooted in educational best practice but rather in the requirement to move GME within the 2025 timeframe. That new early years facilities are proposed for 2021 and new primary schools for 2022 is extremely positive – but ambitious – and parents are concerned about the impact of any slippage in these timetables, especially on the success of the GME secondary school, whose timetable for delivery appears more fixed/established. Parents would like to better understand the rationale for how GME is being developed across the 3-18 site and what Edinburgh Council would do to mitigate issues such as lack of transition in a 3-18 school.

4. Teacher recruitment

Parents welcomed the increased detail on what GME subjects would be provided and the planned development of GME. Parents were concerned that the increase of subjects and qualifications was slow over the five-year period.

There were concerns over the low numbers of support staff and parents hope to see an increase in support staff ahead of 2025.

There were concerns over how sustainable the plan actually is given the current issues regarding recruitment and retention of staff and the lack of immersion at both high school and primary school. The plan gave no indication as to how this increase in staff was to be achieved other than to 'grow our own'. Whilst parents recognise the value in this approach, it is a long-term strategy that does not meet the immediate need for experienced fluent teachers across 3-18. Similarly, supporting high school EME teachers to develop their Gaelic in order to teach within GME is welcomed; however, these teachers will need time and support to reach a level of fluency that matches their pupils.

The issue of workload for GME teachers was raised in relation to creating Gaelic specific resources on top of their delivery as teachers. Is there a support structure that can be put in place to support teachers in the creation of resources for their classes to enable them to focus on the teaching aspects of their role rather than in the translation of materials.

5. Impact on S1 and S2 cohort (could a second primary be established sooner)

There continues to be significant concern about how the transition will be managed to ensure that the first cohort of GME pupils has a positive and engaging experience of high school.

Other than providing support to the S1 and S2, it was unclear what the educational benefit to the P7s of attending high school a year earlier than their peers would be and what would be provided for them at the new school. Several parents/carers actively rejected this idea while other parents/carers sought more information about the plans for this.

There was discussion as to how transition planning should be approached as some parents/carers have children who will be directly affected and other parents/carers whose children will not be affected. How does this affect the decision-making process?

Assuming a decision is made in November 2020 to open a new GME secondary provision in 2025 the educational pathway for children in GME primary will be determined in four different ways. This will have the effect of creating four different experiences for GME primary families:

1. Families with children in C5, C6 and C7 and no younger siblings will be given the certainty that they will continue their education at secondary in JGHS. It could reasonably be expected that the level of GME provision will not fall below the level it would be at in 2025.
2. Families with children in C3, C2 C1 and sgoil-àraich and no older children will be given the certainty that they will continue their education at the new GME secondary. It would be hoped that the level of GME provision would be at a minimum the same as JGHS in 2025 but would increase year on year as the new school grows.
3. Families with children in C4 will be asked to send their children to JGHS for one year and then to send them to the new GME secondary and it is uncertain if they will be given a choice even if they have an older or younger sibling or if they opt to stay at JGHS if they will continue to have a GME offer.
4. Families with children in the upper portion of the school and the lower portion of the school face having siblings in both schools.

Each of these groups need to be engaged with to ascertain the specific wishes and needs of these families we would urge the Council to set up a series of dedicated meetings to discuss the specific pathways for these families.

It was noted by a parent, that the Council refer to 'following the Glasgow model', but have not offered a key part of that model which was to provide S1 and S2 learners with their choice of setting in order to address the issue of parents having siblings in different schools.

Parents/carers need reassurance in the process and the establishment of the new school in order to opt-in to GME.

Parents were interested in the suggestion that older S5-S6 pupils from JGHS would travel to Liberton both to access their GME subjects and to act as older peers/mentors for the younger learners. They questioned whether this could be expanded to include S3-S4 learners, but worried that having to travel to Liberton might reduce the likelihood that the older JGHS learners would choose GME Nat 5, Higher and Advanced Highers, and how this might be mitigated.

Parents also need greater clarity on the curriculum that is proposed from 2026 onwards for S3/4 learners post-Broad General Education and the educational benefits envisaged by CEC compared to the offering at JGHS, to which those learners are currently entitled.

6. Any other issues

There was recognition from parents of the significant development of GME in recent years and the Council's commitment to further develop GME across the city, with particular reference to the work of Bethan Owen as Quality Improvement Officer.

Parents recognise the importance of Gaelic leadership roles within the Council and welcome the role of the Iomairtean Officer and the Gaelic Development Officer in the development of GME. Comann nam Pàrant 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 and to secure the confidence of parents and carers in the development and implementation of the plans.

When Taobh na Pàirce was set up, the Gaelic Development Officer (who was a long-standing member of the Gaelic community) was there to provide information and support to parents and carers and to act as a conduit for questions and concerns. The ambition of Edinburgh Council is to deliver a GME High School and two additional primary schools, building staff numbers across these sites and utilise e-Sgoil, alongside developing early years to deliver 1140 hours per child and running Cròileagan groups across the city. It will be essential to have a Gaelic Development Officer appointed (in line with strategic priority 2 of the Gaelic Language Plan) to oversee the successful delivery of this growth strategy, working across CEC, TnP and JGHS as well as liaising with parents to build confidence ahead of the transition.

Conclusion

To conclude, Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Eideann & Lodainn) has welcomed the opportunity over the last year to provide the CEC with feedback relating to parents and carers views and concerns, and to request information that the parents/carers have asked for in order to make an informed decision about their children's education. It is in this spirit that we continue to work with the Council towards a permanent home for GME at secondary level in Edinburgh.

We are grateful to the team at the Council for reflecting on the input from parents and addressing their concerns. We are pleased to see a positive response to the need to develop new primary schools as soon as possible to support the establishment of the secondary. However, the new plans for a 3-18 provision and the changes in plans for transition have raised new questions and concerns

amongst some parents. Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Eideann & Lodainn) have, over many years, requested a strategic plan for the development of GME that would provide a clear pathway for the development of GME across the city. This is an action point within the Gaelic Language Plan 2018-2022. The outcome report refers to a Gaelic Learning Strategy and we would request that this is published as soon as possible so families can fully understand the educational rationale for how the proposal has been developed to support the education of GME learners.

Whilst we welcome the addition of two new primaries and increased early years provision there is concern over the sustainability and deliverability of this plan with the additional requirement for fluent teachers to deliver an immersion experience at multiple sites across the city. Therefore, we would ask that the Council provide detailed plans and assurances to parents and carers that the recruitment and retention plan can deliver on these ambitions at both primary and high school level.

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Eideann & Lodainn) would strongly recommend that the Council plan and publicise a series of engagement events with parents to look more closely at the specific issues for families. The proposal affects families in different ways depending on the ages and number of children in each family. We would suggest that the Council hold a series of events for groups of parents/carers that reflect the pathways outlined in the appendix 'Pathways for Year Groups' so that the specific issues relating to the transition of each year group at Taobh na Pàirce can be properly explored.

Many Taobh na Pàirce families live within 2 miles of the school. Whilst the non-stop bus was welcomed by some parents, other parents remain unconvinced that the location is suitable, and they remain seriously concerned about the impact on the local school community of the Liberton proposal.

The depth and breadth of curriculum remains a key concern for parents and carers. We would like to request further detail on the curriculum offer and how the Council plan to provide a depth and breadth of curriculum from 2025 onwards whilst the new school establishes itself. How will the school utilise surrounding EME provision and e-Sgoil to support that. The outcome report refers to the secondary school as a standalone but it is not clear what the impact of that is for the design of the school nor the education within in and how being on a shared site will be managed.

It was noted that the outcomes report did not reflect on the previous suggested plans to use 'Darroch and surrounding schools' in the delivery of GME. As noted in December's Comann nam Pàrant report, this interim measure is unacceptable in the delivery of GME and we continue to seek an assurance from the Council on their commitment that 'Every pupil from Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce, if they chose to do so, will move as one cohort to secondary GME provision which is currently provided at James Gillespie's High School'.

The growth of GME in Edinburgh has accelerated significantly, especially at secondary level, over the last couple of 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 work. Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Eideann & Lodainn) will continue to work closely with the City of Edinburgh Council during what continues to be an exciting period of growth and expansion for GME in the city. GME parents and carers are committed to taking a collaborative approach towards securing a successful outcome for the education of our children.

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Eideann & Lodainn)
12.04.2021