



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.