

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann is Lodainn)
Verbal deputation to Education, Children and Families Committee meeting
24 January 2022
Transcript

(Sharon May)

Madainn mhath

'S mise Sharon May and I'm here today with fellow volunteers Seamus Spencer, Orla Hobson and Harriet Baker. We all have children at various stages in Gaelic Medium Education. I am Convenor of Comann nam Pàrant, Harriet is Secretary, Orla is Treasurer and Seamus is Co-Chair of the Parent Council at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce.

Comann nam Pàrant represents families at all stages of GME across Edinburgh and the Lothians. Taobh na Pàirce Parent Council represents the interests of parents with children at primary level, those most affected by the proposal being put forward today. We are united by our shared goal: the best outcome for our children.

We appreciate your time listening to us today. We will make short remarks on item 4.1 Gaelic Medium Education Statutory Consultation. You are being asked today to vote on whether the Council should proceed to statutory consultation. We ask you to vote *against*. We do *not* want to risk jeopardising the work that has been done by making a decision which goes against the wishes of the community it is supposed to serve.

Our perspective is informed by the views of GME families from across the Lothians and we speak on their behalf. We have taken the time to understand their views and reflect these in our actions. We ask the City of Edinburgh Council to do the same today.

I'll now pass you to Seamus.

(Seamus Spencer)

The development of GME in Edinburgh and the Lothians has been achieved through collaboration: parents, teachers, the community and the Council working together in the best interests of children and young people. Thanks to the financial support from both the Council and from the Scottish Government, alongside the hard work and dedication of individuals and organisations, GME has grown from strength to strength. From the first Gaelic unit at Tollcross to the establishment of Taobh na Pàirce and, now, looking towards our own GME high school.

We acknowledge the efforts made to support the development of GME in Edinburgh and the Lothians. We welcome the commitment in the consultation paper to recruit and establish a leadership team during the transition period and to support the development of a teaching team. The offer of additional primary provision across the city is a positive step forward in the expansion of GME.

However, we must also stress that there are significant changes within the Council's proposal: such as the inclusion of a GME secondary facility on the existing Castlebrae High School site in Craigmillar, proposals for changes to primary level provision and a new pupil placement policy which would impact families in Edinburgh and the Lothians. There has been no informal consultation on any of these aspects.

Added to this, the past year has brought with it significant and material change. We find ourselves working within a new context: a manifesto with an explicit commitment to a central, stand-alone school and a Government that is willing to consider further financial support at an appropriate stage and has offered to fund the feasibility study required to explore options fully.

In light of this new political landscape, we urge the Council to collaborate with the Scottish Government. We also ask the Council to develop their relationship with parents. *They* have the right to ask questions about *any* new proposal that is presented.

I'll now pass you to Orla.

(Orla Hobson)

The most recent engagement with GME families comprised two online meetings in November and December 2020. Since then, the Council has made significant changes to their offer but has not undertaken the crucial engagement with parents which is intrinsic to the success of any proposal.

We advise the Council to look at the clear and detailed information we have shared with them this year. In the results of two recent surveys, three written deputations and numerous letters, they will find the views of GME families.

Their overarching message to you is this:

- Take the time to develop a coherent plan for GME, with realistic timescales that parents can have confidence in and can help you deliver
- Undertake much greater, meaningful engagement with families
- Create a proposal that is in the best interests of GME children and GME itself.

The Gaelic community of Edinburgh and the Lothians provides a welcoming and supportive environment in which everyday use of the language is fostered in children and adults alike. Volunteer-led initiatives are at the heart of this: the local Mòd and Fèis Dhùn Èideann play a vital role in music, ball-coise (football) and camanachd (shinty) support skills in sports, while Sradagan youth clubs and Bothan monthly get togethers contribute to a vibrant social calendar.

While some of these rely on financial support from national bodies, they are sustained and advanced by the outstanding dedication of community members. Support from this community is required not only for the proposal itself, but is what will guarantee the success of GME in the long term. It is also what underpins the strength of current provision.

This GME community fosters the transmission of the language across all ages. Cròileagan groups support our youngest members to speak their first Gaelic words and encourage their families to use and learn Gaelic. Parents and carers undertake informal study and formal education in their own time, some going on to become teachers themselves. There are teachers tutored in Gaelic by parents. After school clubs and extracurricular activities, like Òganan and Sradagan offer employment and skills development for GME high school pupils who, in turn, bring Gaelic to the younger children in their care. GME in Edinburgh and the Lothians creates a sustaining cycle: pupils who enter Gaelic education return as teachers. We are committed to working with you in supporting this valuable ecosystem.

I'll now pass you to Harriet.

(Harriet Baker)

We value our relationship with the Council, one in which we act with respect and in good faith. We come here today in the spirit of openness. We have a duty to the parents we represent, and to you - our longtime partners - to tell you the reality of the situation. It is this: parents do not want you to vote to proceed to statutory consultation on these current proposals.

In our most recent survey, which ran from 8pm Thursday 20 January and closed yesterday at noon, we asked parents:

Based on the proposals in the Council's report, do you think that the Education, Children and Families committee should approve a statutory consultation commencing on 31 January 2021?

Out of 248 people who responded:

11 percent said they were unsure
12 percent said yes
77 percent said no

We also asked:

On the basis of the information you have received to date, how confident are you that the Council's proposals will lead to the delivery of a GME high school that will meet the needs of your child or children? (5 meaning very confident, 1 meaning not at all confident)

Out of the 249 people who responded:

6 percent were reasonably or very confident
8 percent were ambivalent
86 percent had little or no confidence

Let us provide clarity on the consequences of the significant decision you are asked to make today:

- Vote to *proceed* to statutory consultation and you bring forward a proposal that has no significant support from the GME community it seeks to serve. This will likely result in a failed consultation which would, in turn, have a significant impact on the development of GME secondary provision.
- Vote *against* proceeding and you give yourself the chance of success. You gain the necessary time to engage with parents and the wider community, create a proposal that meets their needs and, crucially, has their support.

We fully recognise the work that has brought forward the development of GME and we appreciate that the Council does not want to lose momentum. But a delay to the process does *not* undermine the efforts to date. Rather, it is an opportunity, offering as it does the chance to create a success story we can *all* be part of - pupils and their parents, the community and its Council.

We therefore ask you to:

- vote against going to statutory consultation at this time
- continue dialogue and collaboration with Scottish Government

- and engage in meaningful in depth, informal consultation with parents, pupils and the Gaelic community

We urge those here today to focus on what really matters. We ask you to prioritise the children and the community who are at the heart of this decision.

Tapadh leibh
Thank you