



**Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann is Lodainn)
Written Deputation to Education, Children and Families Committee
Tuesday 20 September 2022 at 10am**

Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann is Lodainn) (CNPDE) represents families across Edinburgh and the Lothians. We campaign for the development of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) by liaising with families, listening to their concerns, amplifying their voices and advocating on their behalf.

CNPDE would like to thank the City of Edinburgh Council for the most recent report on Gaelic Medium Education (GME). This brief deputation covers the key sections of the latest update and looks towards the vibrant future of GME in Edinburgh and the Lothians.

While this deputation concerns item 7.4, CNPDE would like to first recognise item 7.1 on your agenda today, Standards & Quality Report and Education Improvement Plan, and celebrate the appointment of Donna MacIver as Depute Head Teacher for GME at James Gillespie's High School (JGHS). This is a significant step and we welcome this commitment to establishing the necessary leadership for GME in the high school. Such investment in people, coupled with the recent capital investments in Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce in enhancing the learning environment and community purpose, builds confidence in the Council's ongoing commitment to the growth of GME in Edinburgh. Mòran taing dha na h-oifigearan.

Update on potential sites

We note the information on Castlebrae detailed in items 4.1 and 4.2, as well as the breakdown of details on the five additional sites and the clarification of discussions with stakeholders as to availability listed in 4.8.

Mitigation measures regarding Liberton

With regards to the mitigation measures for Liberton, we would like to highlight the Council's note that 'irrespective of where a new GME secondary school was established the issues with ensuring immersion would be present.' While we appreciate that there are current issues, such as teacher shortage, that would impact immersion, we remind the Council that immersion issues overall would potentially be exacerbated by a co-located school.

Improvement to the breadth and quality of Gaelic immersion should be at the heart of establishing any GME school. A requirement of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 is to demonstrate what educational benefit will be achieved by any proposal, it is difficult to see what will be different in respect of Gaelic immersion in the co-located model proposed by the Council when compared to the status quo at JGHS.

While the objective of any GME school should be one of maximising immersion, parents are pragmatic and understand that there are practical limits to the level of immersion due to, for example, the number of subjects offered by the national curriculum through Gaelic. However, 4.6 appears to place limits on such a goal from the outset by asserting that a dependency on an English-medium school is a requirement. We are concerned that this approach will not create the conditions to maximise the immersion opportunity.

We also note 6.2 in the report and are concerned by the implication regarding revenue budget and the impacts this may have on staffing. We seek a commitment from the Council to provide ongoing reporting on staffing levels for GME at JGHS, and that these are shared regularly with this Committee, so that it is clear that staffing capacity is increasing at a rate that can meet the need at JGHS and also then properly support a new GME secondary.

We would contest the claim in 4.3 of the report that "details on public transport links to Liberton High School" have been previously provided. Such detail is absent from the informal

consultation documents and what is presented in this report does not represent a level of assessment that was anticipated. For example, no comparative assessment is presented to demonstrate the level of change in journey times. Also, as stated in 4.4 walking time has been omitted and there is no information regarding what time of day this estimate was generated for.

While the offer of shuttle buses in 4.5, between Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce and Liberton High School is an acknowledgment that travel time will be an issue and provides a supportive measure, this proposed solution does not address the problem for many children. The particular issues of a school which has a city-wide catchment where students gather from across all parts of Edinburgh reinforces the importance of centrality and good public transport links. We request that future reports contain greater detail regarding travel impacts and how this interacts with educational benefits.

Key decision making milestones and financial impact

With reference to the key decision-making milestones, the report states that there is 'no budget in the Capital Programme to deliver a GME secondary school'. We ask that there be clarification as to how a GME secondary school would be financed.

We note under financial impact that the Council has retained the possibility of capping the number of pupils entering GME. However, access to GME should remain available for all families and we would expect GME primary provision to be part of the Council's financial plans and part of their plans for the development of GME overall. This is not only because these pupils have a right to be taught in Gaelic but also because the increase of pupils at primary levels then bolsters a GME secondary. We would also seek clarification as to how and if specific actions for GME secondary and primary provision might be incorporated into multi-year strategies such as City Plan 2030.

Additional key points

We welcome the decision of the committee in March to gather more information. However, we are aware that families in GME still face a significant degree of uncertainty in terms of the educational pathway for their children.

For example, 5.4 references potential solutions which families will find concerning such as placement policies or redrawing of catchments. In our March deputation, we reminded the Council of previous proposals to cap numbers or to review catchments. Here we noted that: *'In 2010, the Council's proposal to cap the number of pupils able to access GME was met with significant objection from parents and was subsequently withdrawn. In 2016 the Council proposed restricting the number of pupils going to JGHS based on their distance from the school, disproportionately affecting Gaelic pupils, denying access to GME for some, and splitting the small GME cohort across different secondary schools. This proposal was also withdrawn following campaigning by Comann nam Pàrant and legal intervention by Bòrd na Gàidhlig.'*

It is important that GME children receive parity of esteem and the same assurances of certainty of educational pathway as their EME counterparts. We believe it is reasonable that families with children in GME at primary should have clarity on where they will attend secondary school. We ask the Council to consider this basic need shared by all families and provide an assurance to those with children at Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce of their secondary school placement approach from P1. There should be no catchment review of GME pupils at secondary level until a guaranteed, sustainable, long term alternative for secondary school provision is available.

The expansion of James Gillespie's into the Darroch Annexe, and the increased ability to develop an enhanced GME immersion environment here, offers a strong medium-term solution which establishes a setting where a viable future GME secondary school community can be nurtured pending a future consultation.

We hope that the Council will engage with all of the JGHS feeder primaries and address the capacity issues holistically. When considering capacity solutions in general we would ask that the Council continues to work in partnership with the Scottish Government to derive maximum value from the existing £4m investment from the Gaelic Schools Capital Fund and seek further funding to enhance GME immersive environments such as Darroch.

Next steps

We support the next steps 5.1 - 5.3 and we look forward to achieving cross-party agreement to ensure the implementation of these recommendations.

We highlight in particular 5.1 to "Continue engagement with the GME Community". We ask for clear commitments to support this recommendation in terms of how this engagement will be structured and how this will lead to a shared vision and goals for the delivery of a GME Secondary School and expansion of GME from 0-18 years. Comann nam Pàrant would be happy to work with the Council in supporting meetings and information sessions.

We would also welcome commitments to the establishment of a Short Life Working Group, including parental representation. This would enable a collaborative approach between all partners, allow for greater understanding of how GME in Edinburgh is part of the broader national approach, and create the opportunity for greater rates of progress in realising our shared ambitions. Such a working group could draw on the experiences of those involved in the successful development of GME in Glasgow. Overall, we are keen to move towards establishing the parameters of the project so that we have a framework within which we can all work together, that allows for constructive discussions to flourish and for progress to be made.

We thank the Council for this update, welcome all new members of the Education, Children and Families Committee, and look forward to increased collaboration in supporting the development of GME in Edinburgh and the Lothians.