

Minutes

Education, Children and Families Committee

9.30am, Friday 28 May 2021

Present:

Councillors Perry (Convener), Dickie (Vice-Convener), Cameron (substituting for Councillor Griffiths), Mary Campbell, Douglas, Key, Laidlaw, Rae (substituting for Councillor Burgess), Rust, Louise Young and Work (substituting for Councillor Bird).

Religious Representatives

Fiona Beveridge.

Parent Representative

Alexander Ramage

1. Gaelic Medium Education in Edinburgh – Statutory Consultation

(a) Deputation - Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann & Lodainn).

The deputation raised the following key points:

- The deputation sought a growing Gaelic-medium community at secondary level and the vision of this community staying together in one school
- The deputation supported the position highlighted in the SNP Manifesto which pledged a stand-alone centrally located GME Secondary School in Edinburgh.
- The deputation requested further engagement with parents and carers to clarify what the preferred position was before proceeding with the statutory consultation.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the shared campus option at Liberton, which, as a school not central to the GME population of Edinburgh, added to public transport concerns for parents.
- The deputation reminded Members that the children were central to the proposal. Further delays to the consultation and subsequent building of the school could lead to the loss of a 'clear GME pathway' from Early Years through to the end of Secondary School which was the current experience of children.

The deputation requested the Committee to consider the points raised in making their decision.

(Reference – written submission from Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann & Lodainn)

(b) Report by the Interim Executive Director – Communities and Families

An update was provided on the outcome of the informal consultation process which had recently been undertaken on the future of the learning estate for Gaelic Medium Education in Edinburgh.

Members noted the current position was unclear due to a new national strategic approach for GME outlined by the Scottish Government in their recent Manifesto. Efforts were still ongoing between the Convener of the Committee and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to determine whether the proposal outlined in the report would be supported.

Motion

- 1) To note that following an informal consultation the Council's preferred option for the future of Gaelic Medium Education in Edinburgh was outlined in the draft statutory consultation paper included at Appendix 1.
- 2) To agree that the Convener of Education, Children and Families should write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to seek confirmation whether the proposal outlined in the draft statutory consultation paper aligned with the government's new national strategic approach for the growth of Gaelic Medium Education particularly in relation to the commitment to create a stand-alone secondary school in the centre of Edinburgh.
- 3) To agree that the Convener reports back to the Education, Children and Families Committee on 24 August 2021 on the outcome of these discussions before proceeding to the Statutory Consultation.
- 4) To request that the Education, Children and Families Convener and Vice-Convener write to the Scottish Government to confirm that it would commit to deliver on its manifesto promise for "a stand-alone GME secondary school in central Edinburgh" in order to provide a clear choice for parents in the forthcoming Council consultation on GME secondary education before proceeding with this consultation and also address pressures of overcapacity at James Gillespie's High School.

- 5) To agree that, as soon as the Scottish Government position had been clarified, this would be shared with Education, Children and Families Committee members, Gaelic Implementation Group members and representative parent bodies in advance of the next scheduled meeting of the Education, Children and Families Committee meeting on 24 August 2021.
- moved by Councillor Perry, seconded by Councillor Dickie

Amendment

- 1) Recognises the rising school roll at James Gillespies High School (JGHS), where children from the Gaelic primary school at Taobh na Pairce currently move up to, means that pressure on school capacity is unsustainable and that this Committee and the JGHS Parent Council are rightly seeking a timely solution to this issue;
- 2) Notes the Council's estimates of capacity at JGHS in this report show that there is currently an overcapacity at JGHS of 110 pupils; that with the introduction of around 450 spaces at the Darroch GME annex next year, this overcapacity is eliminated; however with a rising roll, is once more at overcapacity by 13 pupils by 2025-26 and increasing to 89 pupils overcapacity by 2029-30;
- 3) Therefore, understands that with continued rising rolls in the longer term, that even with the Darroch annex, JGHS will not have capacity to host both GME and EME pupils and therefore that a Gaelic High School must be brought forward timeously to address overcapacity at JGHS;
- 4) Welcomes the very significant work undertaken by Council education officers to develop proposals for a Gaelic High School within council resources, including the recent informal consultation with parents and other stakeholders about a co-located GME facility at the new Liberton High School.
- 5) However, notes the result of a survey undertaken by Comann nam Parant, the Gaelic parent body, which found that 51% of parents did not support co-location at Liberton, with 34% uncertain and only 15% in support.
- 6) Further, notes academic research concluding that a stand-alone GME school, rather than a school co-located with English Medium Education, is the most effective for Gaelic language development in children.

- 7) Notes the success of the Gaelic primary at Taobh na Pairce with an intake of around 60 children into P1 last year and strikingly that the in-take is now very predominantly from families living near to the school (around 90%).
- 8) Notes that the proposed joint-campus at Liberton is as far as 5 miles from the Gaelic primary school Taobh na Pairce (TnP) in Leith and that most children at TnP and their families would face a journey of around two hours each day on public transport between their homes and the proposed location at Liberton.
- 9) Therefore, recognises that locating a Gaelic High School this far from the existing Gaelic primary school may discourage families from continuing with, or joining, Gaelic medium education and that this may significantly undermine the current growth of Gaelic in Edinburgh.
- 10) Therefore, believes that a more central location for the new Gaelic high school would maintain a stronger connection with the existing successful Gaelic primary, any new future Gaelic primary capacity in the South and West of Edinburgh and also be better placed to support a Gaelic community hub for the wider City.
- 11) Therefore, welcomes the SNP Holyrood election manifesto commitment on 15 April 2021 which states:

*'To ensure that the GME experience is truly immersive we will have a general presumption **against co-locating GME** schools with English medium schools.*

*'We will support the development of additional GME primary schools in Edinburgh and the Lothians as an important step towards the creation of **a standalone GME secondary school in central Edinburgh**. A central location is necessary to ensure it is accessible from major public transport hubs to allow the new standalone school to serve the wider Lothian region.*

*'Edinburgh City Council has taken forward important engagement on GME provision, but **we will ensure that this is now incorporated within a new national strategic approach**. This is essential if we are to see the faster rates of progress we seek for Gaelic.'*

- 12) Notes that the Council's draft consultation on co-locating a GME High School at Liberton, appended to this report, was drafted before this SNP commitment was published, and does not offer parents any clear choice between a co-located GME high school at Liberton on the periphery of the city and '**a standalone GME secondary school in central Edinburgh**' as promised in the SNP manifesto.

- 13) Recognises that the Council consultation as drafted is therefore fundamentally skewed in favour of co-locating a GME high school at Liberton because parents and other stakeholders may believe that this is the only possible option and way forward for GME and for JGHS and therefore agrees not to proceed with the consultation on this basis.
 - 14) Therefore requests that the Education Convener and Vice-Convener write to the Scottish Government to confirm that it would commit to deliver on its manifesto promise for '**a standalone GME secondary school in central Edinburgh**' in order to provide a clear choice for parents in the forthcoming Council consultation on GME secondary education before proceeding with this consultation and also in time to address pressures of overcapacity at James Gillespie's High School.
- moved by Councillor Mary Campbell, seconded by Councillor Rae

Voting

The voting was as follows

For the motion	-	9 votes
For the amendment	-	2 votes
Abstention	-	1 vote

(For the motion: Councillors Cameron, Dickie, Douglas, Key, Laidlaw, Perry, Rust, Louise Young and Work.

For the amendment: Councillors Mary Campbell and Rae.

Abstention: Fiona Beveridge)

Decision

To approve the motion by Councillor Perry.

(Reference – Report by the Interim Executive Director – Communities and Families)

Declaration of Interest

Alexander Ramage declared a non-financial interest in the above item as a parent of children attending Liberton High School.