

The Future of Gaelic Medium Education Commun nam Pàrant Dhùn Èideann agus Lodainn.

Preamble

The future of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) is being driven by two national initiatives that aim to promote, develop and extend the provision of Gaelic Medium Education within Scotland. On a local level, the City of Edinburgh Council is intending to conduct a feasibility study within the next 6 months into a dedicated school for Gaelic Medium Education in Edinburgh. At a European level, the Government has made promises to Europe about promotion of Gaelic and Scots as part of the European Charter on Minority and Regional Languages. However it is the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act (2005) set in force the requirement for Local Authorities to agree a Gaelic Language Plan in collaboration with the Gaelic community and Bòrd na Gaidhlig. Bòrd na Gaidhlig provides grants e.g. for feasibility studies. As part of the government aims to promote Gaelic Medium Education, Bòrd na Gaidhlig has set targets for the growth of Gaelic Medium Education. To give you an idea of the size of the growth, the national target is 4000 children entering primary 1 by 2021. In 2006/7, Edinburgh contributed to 6% of the national figure of 313 in p1, so should be aiming to grow to around 255 (6% of 4000) by 2021. In terms of classes this is a growth from 1 class to around 10 classes entering primary 1. If growth is to occur at this level, then planning is essential.

What is the role of Commun nam Pàrant?

Commun nam Parant is in regular consultation with the City of Edinburgh Council over Gaelic Development – this includes issues such as transport, Gaelic Language in the Primary School, and funding through the Specific Grant for Gaelic that is received by the Council from the Scottish Government to support Gaelic education development initiatives. During these meetings, the issue of a feasibility study has been raised. The council intends to conduct a feasibility study within the next 6 months. Commun nam Pàrant would like to raise awareness of the issues and promote discussion of any concerns raised by parents as many issues such as growth will undoubtedly have an effect upon ourselves and our children.

Meeting – 1st September 2008.

Around 35 parents met to discuss the future of Gaelic Medium Education. The aim was to communicate with all interested parties: school, parents and council. Ian MacDonald (Convenor of Comman nam Pàrant) gave a presentation:

[Why are we talking about the future?](#)

The reasons are:

- because of the growth in numbers,
- because of the feasibility study the City of Edinburgh Council are about to conduct (in the next 3-6 months) on the possibility of a dedicated Gaelic Medium School, and
- to raise awareness of Gaelic Medium Education (a survey conducted last year revealed that only a third of parents of primary school children in Edinburgh, were aware of Gaelic Medium Education).

Do we need to do this?

- Recent growth in numbers, following increase in nursery size.
- Difficulties in secondary level provision of Gaelic
- Need for a planned approach by CEC and parents,
- Future growth as a result of expansion to meet national targets
- The need for a consensus. Do we need a dedicated Gaelic Medium School – how else can we cope with the growth in numbers?

Why now?

- because of the imminent feasibility study,
- growth in numbers, (following nursery expansion),
- nursery getting full
- national role in fulfilling targets for primary 1 intake,
- Gaelic is hitting the headlines with a new television channel, the Gaelic Act.

Why us?

- The City of Edinburgh Council is developing a plan – in consultation with parents
- The City of Edinburgh Council is under-resourced - we can provide some assistance
- Gaelic Medium Education competes with other needs and has, so far, come off badly
- We know the issues
- To ensure it works out well
- To be able to give well thought through answers when asked during the feasibility study

What is realistic?

- Substantial growth – good education is not hard to sell
- A dedicated school is realistic
- Convincing the council is possible

Questions from the audience included...

1. How will it be financed? The Council can't afford it.

The answer is not straight-forward or even certain at this stage, but Glasgow received funding from government funds. The Council receives an annual Specific Grant for Gaelic to fund new developments and this may also be used.

2. What age should the dedicated school cover?

This has not been decided and is open for discussion.

Andrew Cameron (parent) presented some figures of projected growth in numbers – based on the Glasgow experience. Bòrd na Gàidhlig set out the national target for primary 1 pupil intake in 2021 to be 4000. This compares with the 2006/7 national intake of 313, so this is a substantial growth in intake.

In 2006/7 the Edinburgh intake was around 20, representing 6.4% of the national figure. So Edinburgh could be expected to expand from 20 to 256

by 2021 – in 13 years. A growth from 1 primary one class to around 10 classes entering primary 1.

A recap of the presentation given by Mary Galbraith on the Glasgow Gaelic School, was given, but is not included here as minutes are available.

Amaia Zulaika (parent) spoke passionately about her own experience of Bilingual Education in Spain and attending a Basque Medium School. The Basque Country covers 7 provinces in France and Spain. In the 1960s, Basque Medium Education started by parent power – paid by parents. By 1965, in Amaia's province (with a population the size of Edinburgh), Amaia's school had about 300 children. All children were bussed to school from a wide area. Recovery of the language was very popular because it has been forbidden. By the end of 1970 there were 3000 children. In 2007/08 24% children are in Basque Medium Education, i.e. 21312 children. And, 30% teenagers sit university entrance exams in Basque. The success has been based on (a) parental support for a bilingual education (Basque/Spanish) although Basque schools are now adding English in a move to develop tri-lingual education.

Marion Thompson (parent) presented a possible plan forward:

- Consensus from parents
- Produce a business case
- Work with City of Edinburgh Council
- Use media and political lobbying to promote our case
- Time scale

Political pre-election promises can be used.

The business case requires:

- Council buy-in to the plan – with inclusion of West Lothian, East Lothian and Fife.
- Background of current school
- Benefits of bilingualism
- Projections of number and accommodation issues
- Benefits to growth of Gaelic and the wider community
- Location of school
- Funding
- Strategy for secondary education
- Nursery provision

- Support for English stream pupils

Questions and comments included:

- If we can find solutions to existing council problems and include in the business plan then good. The aim needs to be firmly focused (with possible add-ons).
- Is the Gaelic Language Plan national or local?

Yes, national, 3 councils have already been asked to produce them in the first round (of organisations being asked to produce them by Bòrd na Gàidhlig). Edinburgh is in the second round.

- Bòrd na Gàidhlig helps councils develop plans. Bòrd na Gàidhlig's education officer is keen to help with plans.
- What is Mr Neal's (Headteacher's) view?

Supportive, views it as inevitable with growth of numbers.

- What type of school?

That hasn't been decided yet.

- We should consider the benefits of both models (dedicated school versus Gaelic Medium Unit)

Both the Government and the Council need to deliver on their political promises for expansion.

- Lots of parents aren't here so how do we know that there is consensus. 10 years ago we did not have a consensus.
- What is the alternative? What are the benefits?
- What are the arguments, what are the alternative? We need a SWOT analysis.
- There is a rather rushed feeling – a danger that it is seen as a small group representing their own views.
- The hard fact of the figures is that change must happen. There is a good community feeling currently – we want to include everyone.
- Would the Gaelic Partnership forum be public enough (for discussion). It is another possible opportunity for wider debate.
- GME parents are committed to Gaelic – so we can assume some commitment. We just need to know the extent. What is needed to start, is a communication strategy to disseminate summaries of information so far.
- School is a hugely important focus to the Gaelic community. There are some givens, a common starting point. The status quo is not an option. What are the pressures and outside influences? In practical terms, informed discussion is good. If we had more time we could have gone further with this discussion.

- Need for primary school – serious issues with JGHS. How difficult would it be to go for a 3-18 school? How did Glasgow approach it?
- With a GME unit first, then a dedicated primary, then a 3-18 school.
- Sometime parents need to see that something is going to happen before they'll engage in the discussion.
- Could we target each family – only about 80 and we have over 30 here?
- Could it be done informally, on a class by class basis?
- Could the school call a meeting for an open discussion on the 20th year celebrations?
- What are the alternatives? Until we know where we want to go it may be a little premature in taking it to the school.
- National impetus – we need to be clear about the government drive and parental opportunity to influence this.
- Timescales are driven by the council decision to carry out a feasibility study that will happen (whether we have a consensus or not) within the next 3-6 months as they have already applied to funding from Bòrd na Gàidlig. It may not be long to talk but it is better to give informed responses to the questions that the council will ask.
- Actions: Duncan and Terry to help organise the next meeting – Duncan to chair a meeting in about 3 weeks time. With small group discussions.

Commun nam Pàrant have been in discussions with the City of Edinburgh Council for the last 2 years, over the development of Gaelic Education. This has been very useful in enabling discussions of transport of the children and in discussion of the CEC's Gaelic Language Plan.