



## **CONSULTATION REPORT**

### **Gaelic Medium Education: Proposed New Catchment Areas**

This Consultation Report has been compiled in response to a public consultation carried out from August to October 2021, on proposals to establish school catchment areas for the existing Gaelic Medium Education provision in Aberdeen City.

The document summarises the feedback received on the proposals set out below and Aberdeen City Council's response to the verbal and written comments submitted by interested parties, in compliance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

#### **Proposals:**

To establish a catchment area for the existing Gaelic Medium Education provision at Hazlehead Academy, to overlay the existing English medium catchment areas for Hazlehead Academy, Northfield Academy and Aberdeen Grammar School;

And:

To establish a catchment area for the existing Gaelic Medium Education provision at Gilcomstoun School, to overlay the existing English medium catchment areas for Gilcomstoun School, Ashley Road School, Mile End School and Skene Square School;

And:

That the new catchment areas should take effect from 1 August 2022.

Maps illustrating the proposed new school catchment boundaries are included at Annex A of this report.

## **1. METHODOLOGY**

This consultation was conducted in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. All requirements of the legislation have been met.

## **2. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS**

### **2.1 Public Event**

A public consultation event to discuss the proposals was held on 14 September 2021, at 7.00pm. The event took place at Mile End School, and stakeholders were also able to participate in the meeting remotely, via an online platform. The event was attended by 3 members of the public in person, and 39 individuals joined the meeting online.

### **2.2 Comments Received**

61 responses to the consultation were submitted via the Council's online consultation portal. Six written comments were also received via email, including responses from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, Comann nam Pàrant and Aberdeenshire Council.

Overall, 55 respondents, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Comann nam Pàrant, indicated that they were not in support of the proposals, whilst 8 respondents indicated that they were in support of the proposals.

All of the submissions, anonymised as necessary, are available to view on the Council's website: [www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/schoolsconsultations](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/schoolsconsultations)

### **2.3 Issues Raised**

The main issues raised at the public meeting and in the written responses to the consultation, are summarised below.

Respondents who indicated that they did not agree with the proposal, raised the following points:

- The point raised most often (by 56% of the total number of respondents), was that the proposed catchment areas are too limited, and are inequitable. It was felt that GME should be available to all, rather than being dependent on postcode, and so the catchment areas should be city wide.
- Around one third of the respondents also stated that the proposals do not promote and support GME (which is a requirement of the statutory guidance on GME provision), and that the proposed catchment areas would make access to GME more difficult.
- 15% of respondents stated that there was no educational benefit to the proposals.
- Concerns were raised (in one sixth of the responses) that pupils currently attending primary GME provision will not be entitled to a place at the secondary provision, because they will not be living in the secondary catchment zone. It was felt that this would mean there would be no continuity from primary to secondary school for these pupils.

- 13% of the respondents were concerned that although there may be sufficient space in the GME provisions now, there may not be in future – and that the Council would not be obliged to make the provision any larger. It was felt that this would mean that placing requests could not be accepted.
- 10% of the responses argued that the proposals discriminate against those who are unable to provide transport for their children. One respondent felt that the availability of financial assistance (for those in financial difficulty) for transport is not made clear to parents.
- Some of the respondents who said they did not support the proposals, appeared to have mistakenly thought that the proposal was about introducing new GME provision, or expanding it across schools. Six respondents stated that GME is not necessary and that the proposal would be a waste of money and / or resources, whilst another felt that GME should only be an option in schools and shouldn't replace English medium education.
- Four of the respondents suggested that the proposed catchment areas would open up the possibility of parents requesting new GME units to be established in other parts of the city (if there are 5 or more parents requesting this), and that this would impact negatively on the existing provisions.
- Two respondents stated that 'reasonable travel distance' does not necessarily mean walking distance, and that parents are likely to be happy to travel further than this.

Respondents who indicated that they were in support of the proposal, gave the following reasons for this:

- One respondent stated that they were in support of the proposal, but felt that GME should be offered to all pupils, as it is important to preserve our Scottish heritage.
- One respondent stated that they welcomed the fact that pupils are not forced to undertake GME, and that it is just an option, whilst another felt that it would be nice to see Gaelic being taught in more schools.
- One further respondent acknowledged that the proposals would provide clarity of provision, and went on to state that resources should be used to focus on other languages, such as Norwegian, Dutch or Mandarin, or at least Spanish or German, as these would make more sense in Aberdeen.

### Response from Bòrd na Gàidhlig

In its response to the consultation, Bòrd na Gàidhlig expressed its disappointment about the catchment areas which have been proposed, stating that these would disadvantage the people of Aberdeen, and would not encourage a greater uptake of GME.

The issues highlighted in the organisation's response included a concern that most Aberdeen residents would be excluded from the proposed catchment areas, despite

the GME service being funded as a service for everyone. It was also noted in the response that Local Authorities have a duty to promote GME, and that catchment areas should attract parents to choose GME provision for their children. Bòrd na Gàidhlig's view is that the catchment areas being proposed will not attract families to the GME service in Aberdeen.

There was also a concern expressed about the different catchment areas which are proposed for primary and secondary GME provision. It was felt that this could create confusion and obstacles for parents, and that this approach does not assist with implementing the statutory guidance for local authorities on planning for continuity and progression in GME from P7 to S1.

#### Response from Comann nam Pàrant

In the response to the consultation submitted by Comann nam Pàrant, concerns were raised about the size of the catchment areas which have been proposed, and it was suggested that generally, a reasonable travel distance for pupils wishing to receive GME is interpreted to mean any distances up to 15 miles. The response noted that since it was established in Aberdeen, GME provision has been city-wide, with families supported to access the provisions at Gilcomstoun School and Hazlehead Academy, and the organisation could not see why this should now change.

It was suggested that to avoid unreasonable travel distances, GME should be introduced to other schools in Aberdeen, as this would ensure that all pupils are treated fairly. The response also argued that the proposed catchment areas would make GME an unattractive option for the majority of families, and would exclude those who are unable, physically or financially, to transport their children to school.

The response from Comann nam Pàrant stated that establishing different catchment areas for primary and secondary GME provision does not promote a 3-18 curriculum, and that the proposal would do nothing to promote the growth of GME in the city. It was felt that there was no educational benefit in the proposals. Concerns were also raised about the future pupil numbers at Gilcomstoun School and Hazlehead Academy, and whether this may in future mean that the GME provisions at those schools will not have available capacity to allow placing requests to be accepted.

#### Response from Aberdeenshire Council

In its response to the consultation, Aberdeenshire Council confirmed its support for the proposals, noting that pupils outwith the proposed catchment areas would be required to submit a placing request, and so the proposal does not present any changes for families residing in Aberdeenshire.

### **2.4 Education Scotland Report**

An essential element of the statutory consultation process is the involvement of Education Scotland, whose report is provided as Annex B of this Consultation Report.

In its report, Education Scotland noted that the respondents who oppose the proposal, were largely comprised of parents who currently access Gaelic Medium Education, have done so in the past, or who plan to do so in the future. The report highlighted the concerns raised in responses to the consultation, including the view that there was a

lack of rationale to the proposal, and a lack of connection to national policy and statutory guidance for Gaelic. Respondents' view that the proposed catchment area was too small, was also noted in the report.

Education Scotland also noted that there had been no pre-consultation discussions with stakeholders with regard to the proposals. Although it was acknowledged that this is not a statutory requirement, HM Inspectors suggested that this would have been helpful to stakeholders, had it been carried out.

The report referred to concerns that the proposed catchment areas would not enable equal access for children to Gaelic Medium Education, without the need for placing request, and it was stated in the report that more work needs to be done to establish the educational benefits of the proposal, and how any adverse effects of the proposal will be mitigated against. The need to improve transitions between the primary and secondary Gaelic Medium provisions was also highlighted.

### **3. THE COUNCIL'S RESPONSE TO ISSUES RAISED DURING THE CONSULTATION PERIOD AND CONTAINED WITHIN THE EDUCATION SCOTLAND REPORT**

#### **3.1 The proposed catchment areas are too limited, and should be city wide to ensure equity of access**

Prior to establishing the catchment area for any provision account must be taken of reasonable travelling distance. When considering the proposed catchment areas, officers took reasonable travelling distance to be the ability to walk to school independently. Access to the provision is available to all City parents who live outwith the catchment area, through submitting a placing request, in line with the general principle that pupils should be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents so long as this is compatible with suitable instruction and training and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure.

#### **3.2 The proposals do not link to national policy and statutory guidance, do not promote and support GME, and access to GME would be more difficult**

The proposals ensure a commitment to support the provision of GME within Aberdeen City, so far as reasonably practicable, which is the Council's statutory duty. The catchment areas overlay a number of school catchment areas in accordance with the statutory guidance. Physical access will not be affected by the proposals. The only change would be the requirement for a placing request for those pupils living outwith the catchment areas.

#### **3.3 There is no educational benefit to the proposals**

The educational benefits of the proposals were outlined in the consultation document. The proposals described in this document form part of Aberdeen City Council's overall approach to the promotion of Gaelic medium education, and should be considered alongside other measures being undertaken to promote Gaelic through the Gaelic Language plan.

The educational benefits of bilingualism and the promotion of Gaelic include providing young people with a better sense of the structure of language, and children with access to Gaelic medium education are also likely to find it easier to learn other additional languages.

The creation and confirmation of the proposed new catchment areas will help to demonstrate the Council's commitment to the long-term future of Gaelic Medium education in Aberdeen. This will enable young people in the city to continue to develop these skills for life, and may also help to reduce 'drop-out' rates from GME on the transition from primary school to secondary school.

It is important to note also the alternative views of some respondents to the consultation, who felt that there would be more benefit in employing resources in developing skills in other languages, rather than in Gaelic.

### 3.4 There would be no continuity from primary to secondary GME provision, and transitions need to be improved

The primary GME catchment area is part of the secondary GME catchment area and therefore promotes the continuity from primary to secondary. The proposed GME primary catchment area is wholly contained within the proposed GME secondary catchment area, so if the proposals are accepted, any children living within the GME primary catchment area and therefore eligible to attend the primary provision, will also be living within the GME secondary catchment area and will also therefore be entitled to progress to the GME secondary provision.

Continuity is about effective transition arrangements for learners and establishing the catchment areas provides assurances around the future of GME in Aberdeen City. A full time teacher has recently been appointed to the GME provision at Hazlehead Academy, and this teacher has already begun to support transition activity between the primary and secondary GME provisions.

### 3.5 There may be insufficient space for GME provision in future, leading to placing requests being refused

Using data currently available to us regarding our GME provision forecasts, we are confident that future placing requests can be accommodated. Whilst it is suggested in Education Scotland's report that there is a growing demand for GME in some parts of the country, there is little evidence of this happening in Aberdeen.

### 3.6 The proposals would not allow equal access to GME provision, and would discriminate against those who are unable to provide transport

Transport is not currently being provided for those attending GME provision, and this has had no impact on the numbers in both settings. However, anyone unable to provide transport can request assistance from the Council. In light of comments received during this consultation, officers will ensure that the Council's website is updated, to make the procedure for requesting assistance clearer.

In addition, from 31 January 2022, all children and young people in Scotland aged between 5 and 21 will be eligible for free bus travel.

### 3.7 There would be a possibility of requests for new GME provision in other parts of the city, which would impact negatively on the existing provisions

The threshold for an obligatory full assessment under the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 is that an education authority is satisfied that there is demand for Gaelic Medium Primary Education (GMPE) in the GMPE assessment area, from the parents of at least five children who are resident in the GMPE assessment area and all in the same pre-

school year group. Should this threshold be reached and the Council is satisfied that there is demand in another area of the city, then the Council would be obliged to undertake a full assessment of primary GMPE in the area. As far as officers are aware, there has not previously been a GMPE parental request for assessment in Aberdeen.

### 3.8 'Reasonable travel distance' should not be restricted to walking distance

Officers have interpreted the guidance on reasonable travel distance as reasonable walking distance as set out in section 42 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. The Statutory guidance on Gaelic Education states that it is up to Education Authorities to determine what is reasonable and does not prescribe or even mention any minimum or specific distance.

### 3.9 There was no pre-consultation discussion regarding the proposals

There is no statutory requirement to undertake pre-consultation for proposals to alter catchment areas.

### 3.10 GME provision should be available in all other schools

Rolling out face to face provision in all schools would be problematic as there are insufficient Gaelic speaking teachers available. Funding these additional teachers would also impact on other education budgets and would likely require a reduction in other (English medium) education services provided by the Council.

Whilst recent Scottish Government grants have funded approximately one third of the costs of GME provision with the remainder being covered by the City Council, there is no guarantee that any funding will be made available for any existing or future expansion of GME in the City

However, Gaelic language learning is in fact already available to anyone who wishes to benefit from it, as provision is available to all online. This mode of delivery may help to promote GME more effectively than in-school face-to-face provision, as it is not limited by the number of Gaelic speaking teachers available.

It should be noted that GME provision is not available in any schools in Aberdeenshire, and so pupils living in Aberdeenshire are able to access the provision within Aberdeen City.

## **4. COMPLIANCE WITH SECTION 9(1) OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010 AND CONSIDERATION OF THE PROPOSALS**

Following the conclusion of the consultation period, Section 9(1) of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, requires the Council to review the relevant proposal, having had regard to any written representations that have been received by it during the consultation period, any oral representations made to it at the public meeting held on 14 September, and Education Scotland's report.

In terms of Section 10(2) (e) of the said Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, the Consultation Report is required to contain a statement explaining how the Council complied with its duty under the above Section 9(1) of the Act.

With relation to Section 9(1) of the 2010 Act and having considered all of the information received during the consultation process, officers have reviewed the proposed catchment areas carefully, taking into account the points outlined below:

- Whilst officers have taken on board comments about travelling distances, they have also taken account of the definition of reasonable walking distance as set out in section 42 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980. Officers believe the catchment areas should reflect reasonable walking distance to school. The proposed catchment areas also overlay a number of English medium catchment areas, in accordance with the statutory guidance.
- There is no evidence of an increased demand for GME provision across the local authority. Approximately 21% of the GME pupil population reside in Aberdeenshire. Any children living outwith the proposed new catchment areas can still access the provision, through a placing request. The proposal supports parents being able to access education according to their wishes, whilst avoiding unreasonable public expenditure.
- If the Council was to set the catchment zones to cover the entire city, then it would be obliged to pay transport costs for pupils who live within the new catchment zone but more than a reasonable travel distance from their school (considered to be 2 miles from their primary school or 3 miles from their secondary school). In past years transport costs for GME provision amounted to £56,000 per year. This equates to approximately £1700 per pupil. A decision was taken in 2019 as part of budget savings to remove the provision of free transport for pupils attending GME provision. In exceptional circumstances, however, the Council will still consider the provision of free transport, in line with arrangements for children attending all schools in Aberdeen City.
- By introducing the proposed new catchment areas, the Council would be clarifying its admission guidelines for GME provision, and bringing them in line with the general guidelines which apply to admissions to all schools in Aberdeen City. The Council's commitment to continue to provide GME, along with the offering of online provision, will help to further promote the Gaelic language, through providing flexible choices for families.

In light of the above points, officers have concluded that the proposed catchment areas are appropriate, and that there is no reason to change the original proposal.

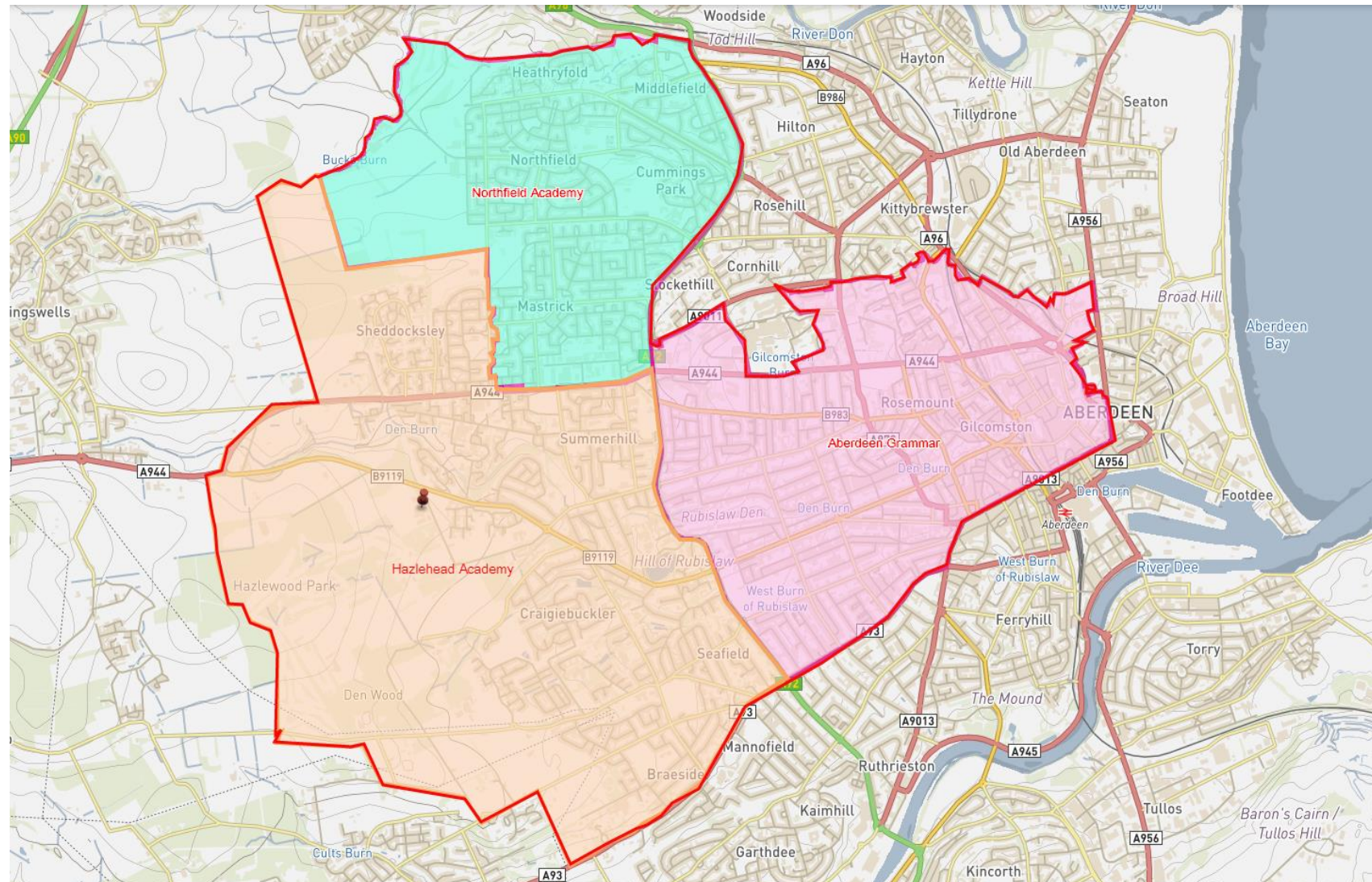
## **5. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Education Operational Delivery Committee agrees to implement the proposed catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education provision, as defined within the maps at Annex A, with effect from 1 August 2022.

**Steve Whyte**  
**Director of Resources**  
**December 2021**

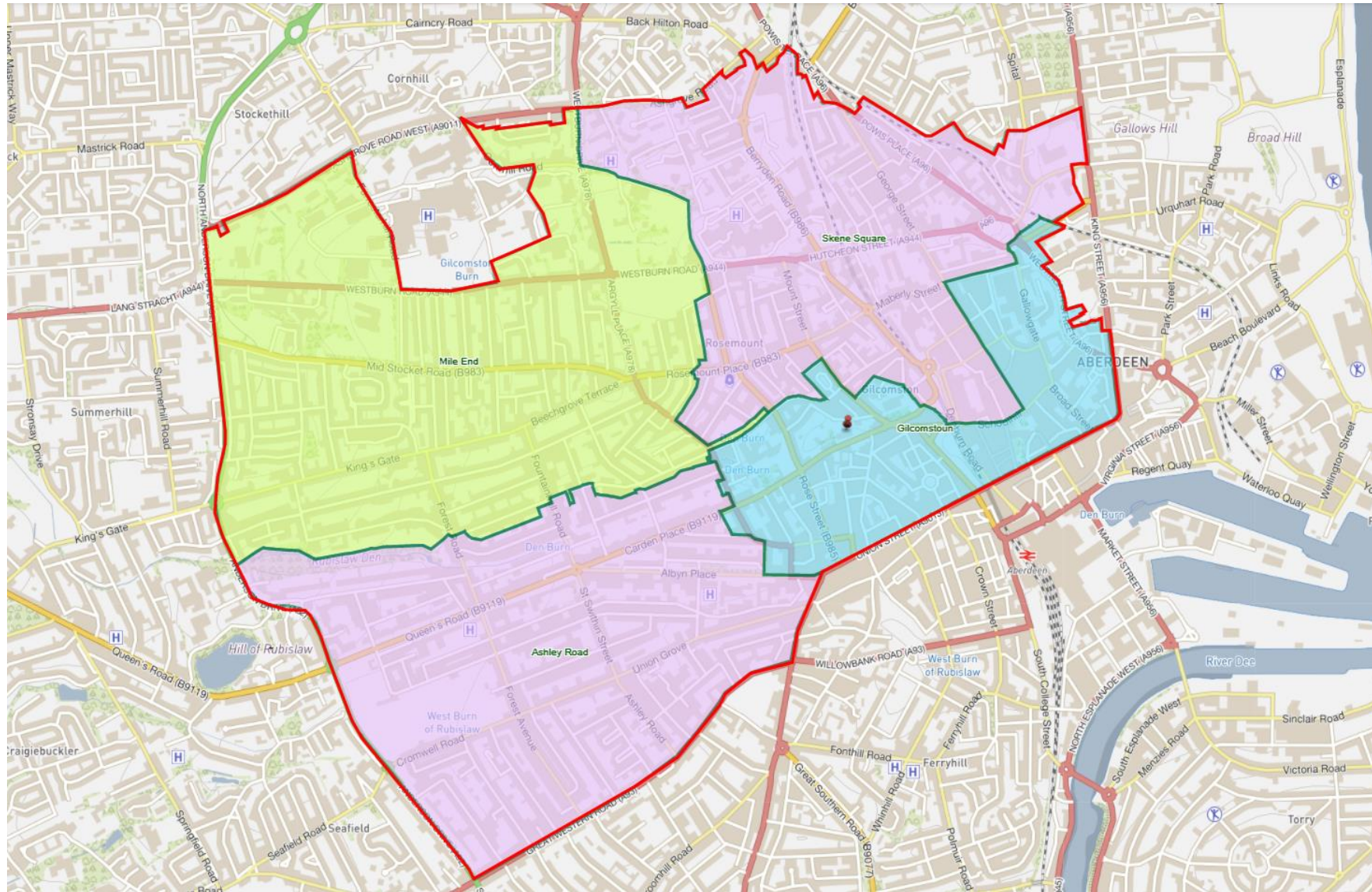


### Proposed catchment area for secondary GME provision



*The proposed catchment area is indicated by the red line, and overlays the existing English Medium school catchment zones for Hazlehead Academy, Northfield Academy and Aberdeen Grammar School. The pin symbol indicates the location of Hazlehead Academy.*

## Proposed catchment area for primary GME provision



*The proposed catchment area is indicated by the red line, and overlays the existing English Medium school catchment zones for Gilcomstoun School, Ashley Road School, Mile End School and Skene Square School. The pin symbol indicates the location of Gilcomstoun School.*

## REPORT FROM EDUCATION SCOTLAND

# Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

**Report by HM Inspectors of Education addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeen City Council to establish catchment areas for existing Gaelic Medium Education provisions. At Hazlehead Academy, to overlay the existing English medium catchment areas for Hazlehead Academy, Northfield Academy and Aberdeen Grammar School. At Gilcomstoun School, to overlay the existing English medium catchment areas for Gilcomstoun School, Ashley Road School, Mile End School and Skene Square School. The new catchment areas should take effect from 1 August 2022.**

November 2021

## 1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Aberdeen City Council's proposal to establish catchment areas for the Gaelic Medium Education provisions at Hazlehead Academy and Gilcomstoun Primary School. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the 2010 Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and

- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance, using virtual connections, at the public meeting held on 14 September 2021 in connection with the council's proposals;
- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and
- discussion with relevant consultees.

## 2. Consultation process

2.1 Aberdeen City Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. The formal consultation ran from 23 August 2021 to 8 October 2021. The proposal paper was distributed to a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties. Aberdeenshire Council make placing requests to send children and young people to Aberdeen City Council to be educated through the medium of Gaelic. They are supportive of the proposal as it does not impact on families residing in Aberdeenshire. They do not comment on proposal's impact for future families. A dedicated area of Aberdeen City Council's website afforded interested parties both information and an opportunity to respond to the statutory consultation. This attracted 61 responses, with a further six responding by email. Almost all of the respondents, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Comann nam Pàrant, did not support the proposed catchment areas. The respondents who oppose the proposal were largely comprised of parents who currently access Gaelic Medium Education, have done so or those who plan to do so in the future. The local Gaelic community, including a few specialist academics also oppose the proposal.

2.2 There were common and consistent themes to the concerns expressed in responses to the statutory consultation. These included a lack of rationale and connection to national policy, practice and statutory guidance for Gaelic, catchment areas being too small, with a different catchment area established for the primary provision to that of the secondary. A significant number of respondents expressed the view that a lack of fairness and equity would result from the proposal, should it be established. There was also a consensus that pre-consultation discussions, although not statutory, would have been helpful prior to stakeholders being presented with the proposals as part of a statutory process. HM Inspectors' evaluative activities confirmed these legitimate concerns. Bòrd na Gàidhlig in their response refer to providing the council with recommendations on the proposed catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education. They report that these have not been taken into account. Bòrd na Gàidhlig view the current proposals as being a disadvantage to the people of Aberdeen and not encouraging a greater uptake of Gaelic Medium Education. This is a statutory duty.

2.3 The public meeting was attended by three members of the public in person, and 39 joined the meeting virtually using technology. Two officers at Aberdeen City Council presented the proposal and received questions on the themes already highlighted in this report. The public meeting offered an opportunity to explore the proposal. HM Inspectors agree with stakeholders that the meeting did not allay concerns and justify the educational benefits from this proposal.

## 3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Aberdeen City Council has one nursery, primary and secondary provision that offers Gaelic Medium Education. In 1991, Gaelic Medium Education was established by Grampian Regional Council (as it existed at the time) for its area in response to parental demand. At that time, strategic planning resulted in Gaelic Medium Education being available to all pupils within the city, should that be parents' preferred option in education. The current Gaelic Medium Education provision is based within schools that also offer education through the medium of English. The council is yet to set up additional provisions, or all Gaelic schools as is happening in some other parts of the country as a result of growth in Gaelic Medium Education. In 2017, Bòrd na Gàidhlig published Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education asking that catchment areas be set up for Gaelic Medium Education to support a sector of education experiencing growth nationally. Aberdeen City Council's proposal would establish catchment areas that do not enable equal access to Gaelic Medium Education for children and young people living in the council area, without the need for placing requests for a large number of residents.

3.2 From our scrutiny activity, HM Inspectors have evidenced that the council has substantial work to do to establish the educational benefits that would result from their proposals, should these be advanced further. The council have also to establish how they will mitigate against adverse effects that may result from the proposal, should it be advanced. They are still to convince parents and other stakeholders of the educational benefits of their proposals. HM Inspectors see the educational benefits statements as being very general aspirations and do not view the proposals as resulting in educational benefits.

3.3 Stakeholders with whom HM Inspectors met confirmed that they were not consulted about the setting of catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education before arrangements were made available to them as part of a statutory consultation. Almost all felt that the council should have undertaken informal consultation in order to listen, explore with, explain and empower parents in setting up catchment areas that result in educational benefits. This consultation could have included how the proposal makes Gaelic Medium Education an attractive option for current and future parents who do and may use Gaelic Medium Education within the city.

3.4 HM Inspectors agree with stakeholders' views on the lack of clarity from the proposal on how these will contribute to meeting outcomes of national and local strategic plans. This includes the targets the council have set as part of their statutory Gaelic Language Plan and how they demonstrate their impact towards national targets for Gaelic. The council should also give further consideration to how their proposals meet the context set in their own paper on their service delivery model. This states that they aim to enact the underpinning principles of strengthening transparency, accountability, engagement, inclusiveness, shared vision and values, and a commitment to joint learning. The council also references their Local Outcome Improvement Plan with its vision for all people, families, businesses and communities to do well, succeed and flourish in every aspect. For the majority of parents currently using Gaelic Medium Education, the proposed catchment areas would result in them being out with the catchment area. This resonated with concerns that the catchment areas were too small and should be set for the whole of the city. It was unclear to stakeholders why a different catchment area was set for the primary and secondary. Stakeholders felt that the requirement to make a placing request may have an adverse effect on the future uptake for Gaelic Medium Education. They also did not approve that a catchment area was set around a "reasonable walking distance" when only one Gaelic Medium Education service was available across the city. In practice, it is an established factor of Gaelic Medium Education that, on the whole, pupils do have to travel further for this specialist provision than their counterparts do to receive learning through the medium of English. Parents are also seeking more clarity on their entitlement to 3-18

Gaelic Medium Education as a priority, should school rolls increase in the future. Comann nam Pàrant in their response have said that their request for the council's Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment on the proposal has not been met. The council also needs to address Comann nam Pàrant's concerns that, should the proposal go ahead, inequalities for children, young people and families will be increased rather than reduced. This clarity is particularly required considering that the council has only one provision for Gaelic Medium Education as opposed to multiple provisions in learning through English.

3.5 Stakeholders in their discussions with HM Inspectors reflected on the factors contributing to growth in Gaelic Medium Education in other urban areas of Scotland. HM Inspectors agree that learning from others' success is a reasonable reflection activity that may influence change and improvement for Gaelic Medium Education. A number of stakeholders reported feelings of anxiety, concern, unfairness and inequity resulting from the proposals. They reported that they could not see the educational benefits of the proposal and how it is promoting Gaelic Medium Education. Parents reported additional financial and time burdens as they transported their children to school. This was exacerbated when parents had children at both the primary and secondary stages. The council should consider these factors as part of their focus on equity, inequality and reducing the cost of the school day. Parents need to be advised of how to access financial assistance from the council when they are experiencing such barriers. This should be taken forward in a collaborative, consultative and outcome-focused way. Parents in choosing Gaelic Medium Education are supporting a national target of creating a sustainable future for the language.

3.6 HM Inspectors in recent school inspections for Gilcomstoun School and Hazlehead Academy evidenced that transitions between primary and secondary needed to be improved. In this statutory consultation, the teachers and senior leaders with whom we spoke in Gilcomstoun School and Hazlehead Academy showed commitment in taking this forward. At Hazlehead Academy, staff also spoke to us of improvements to Gaelic Learner Education as part of setting a more conducive ethos for Gaelic Medium Education. Transitions have still to improve so that all young people continue their immersion experiences at the secondary stages, given the additional value for fluency beyond studying Gàidhlig (Gaelic) as a subject in the curriculum. Going forward, there should be a more explicit commitment to improved continuity between primary and secondary Gaelic Medium Education. This proposal as it stands does not result in educational benefits for continuity and transition.

## 4. Summary

4.1 HM Inspectors have considered Aberdeen City Council's proposal to establish catchment areas for the Gaelic Medium Education provisions at Hazlehead Academy and Gilcomstoun School. We agree that there are legitimate concerns that the council has still to address. We have evidenced very strong opposition from stakeholders who could not agree that the proposals will result in educational benefits. HM Inspectors have not evidenced that the council has prepared an educational benefits statement that includes all of the criteria listed under Section 3 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. The lack of pre-consultation work has been unhelpful in arriving at a consensus. It has caused a degree of anxiety that may have been avoided. Such pre-consultation could have assisted stakeholders in contributing their specialisms to devising a proposal that takes forward parents' and the council's commitment to national planning for Gaelic. Going forward, stakeholders' legitimate comments need to be taken into account in the strategic development of Gaelic Medium Education within the council. Bòrd na Gàidhlig, as statutory consultees, need to be enabled to be active participants in the consultation.

4.2 The council has significant work still to do to establish the educational benefits of their proposals. It is the view of HM Inspectors that catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education should make learning through Gaelic attractive and feasible, whilst promoting high-quality standards, equity, equality, inclusion and growth as required by national planning. The council in proposing these catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education leave many potential pupils out with the catchment area. The council need to ensure it is meeting its duty to promote and support Gaelic Medium Education. They also need to ensure they are reducing inequality of outcome for children and young people.

4.3 In its final report, the council needs to make clear how parents make future requests for establishing further Gaelic Medium Education provisions as set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 2016.

**HM Inspectors  
November 2021**