



CONSULTATION REPORT

Gaelic Medium Education: Proposed New Catchment Areas

This Consultation Report has been compiled in response to a public consultation carried out from January to March 2023, 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, which is bounded by Aberdeen City's local authority boundary;

And:

To establish a catchment area for the existing Gaelic Medium Education provision at Gilcomstoun School, which is bounded by Aberdeen City's local authority boundary;

And:

That the new catchment areas should take effect from 1 August 2023.

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 8 February 2023, at 7.00pm. The event took place at Aberdeen Grammar School and was attended by one member of the public, who indicated that they did not have any concerns or comments to make about the proposal.

2.2 Comments Received

22 responses to the consultation were submitted to the Council, by email or via the Council's online consultation portal. These included responses from Bòrd na Gàidhlig, and Comann nam Pàrant.

Overall, 16 respondents, including Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Comann nam Pàrant, indicated that they were in support of the proposals, whilst four respondents indicated that they were not 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

2.3 Issues Raised

The main issues raised in the written responses to the consultation, are summarised below.

Respondents who indicated that they were in support of the proposed catchment areas, made the following points:

- It was felt by several respondents that the proposals were positive and would help to promote the uptake of GME in Aberdeen. Some went on to comment that the proposal takes stakeholders' views into account and that this shows that the Council has listened to concerns raised previously.
- Respondents also commented that the proposed catchment areas are ideal, in that they include all city residents, making it an inclusive proposal and encouraging all to attend GME, providing equal access to every child in the city regardless of their financial situation.
- Some respondents took the opportunity to raise their concerns about the lack of availability of Gaelic medium teachers in Aberdeen, and the impact that this may have on the future development of GME in the city.
- In its response to the consultation, Bòrd na Gàidhlig stated that it welcomes the Council's proposal, noting that the proposed city-wide catchment areas would

ensure GME is more accessible and more attractive to prospective parents and children.

- In its response, Comann nam Pàrant also stated that it welcomes the Council's proposals, and that the proposed catchment areas would encourage growth in GME and provide educational benefit for pupils, whilst the entitlement to transport would encourage more families to consider GME as an option for their children's education.

Comments from the four respondents who indicated that they did not agree with the proposal, focused on concerns around the perceived cost of providing GME, and a view that providing GME would mean there is less funding available to spend on English medium education. It was also suggested that the curriculum should focus on "core subjects" and that there is no requirement to learn Gaelic in Aberdeen.

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 overall, respondents to the consultation were in support of the Council's proposals, and that stakeholder considered the proposals to be inclusive, as they would allow all children in the city to have access to GME. Stakeholders also felt that the proposals would help to improve continuity of GME between the primary school and secondary school provisions.

It was noted in the Education Scotland report that some of the stakeholders who were spoken to by HM Inspectors require further clarity on the transport arrangements which will be in place, should the proposed catchment areas be implemented. In particular there was a concern about potential long travel times for children to travel to the GME provision, and the need for some children to use more than one transport connection as part of their journey. There was also a request for reassurance to be given to parents on how children and young people would be kept safe when travelling to school, and also for reassurance that free school transport would not be removed in the future.

HM Inspectors also reported a feeling amongst stakeholders that there would be a benefit to the Council having a better strategy for recruiting and retaining teachers of GME. Stakeholders also asked for assurance that there would be no limits in future on the numbers of pupils who are able to access GME at either of the provisions.

Finally it was recommended in the report that the Council should specify its arrangements for free transport for GME, how this will be sustained financially in the long term and how children will be kept safe on the transport. It was also suggested that the Council should consider further use of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic education in respect of placement requests and enrolments.

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

3.1 Concerns around GME teacher recruitment

The Council is working closely with all GME teacher training providers to promote teaching GME in Aberdeen City. The role of Principal Teacher has been created to provide a promotion route within the service. Promotional material has been produced, including a short video highlighting the benefits of coming to teach GME in Aberdeen. It is hoped that these strategies will assist in boosting GME teacher numbers in the city in future.

3.2 Arrangements for free school transport

It is proposed that primary aged children who live two miles or more from the GME provision at Gilcomstoun School will receive shared contracted school transport. To maintain children's safety when travelling to school, all drivers on school transport are members of the Protection of Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme members and following an assessment are approved to provide passenger transport services by the Council.

Secondary aged children and young people who live three miles or more from the GME provision at Hazlehead Academy will be encouraged to utilise the Under 22's free bus travel scheme, or alternatively will be issued with a bus pass by the Council, to utilise public transport services to access school. This will in general require no more than one change of bus service.

In delivery of school transport the Council follows best practice guidance issued by both the UK and Scottish Governments which states that as a general guide, transport arrangements should not require a child to make several changes on public transport resulting in an unreasonably long journey time. The council also aims to ensure that the length of journeys to school is no more than 45 minutes each way for primary school pupils and 75 minutes each way for secondary school pupils. Officers have assessed the likely journeys required to reach the GME provisions and are satisfied that the transport arrangements proposed would be in line with this guidance.

3.3 Enrolment in GME and ensuring there are no limits on future pupil numbers

Using data currently available regarding GME provision forecasts, officers are confident that for the foreseeable future, there will be sufficient capacity available within the primary and secondary GME provisions to accommodate the numbers of pupils likely to be requesting enrolment within these provisions.

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.

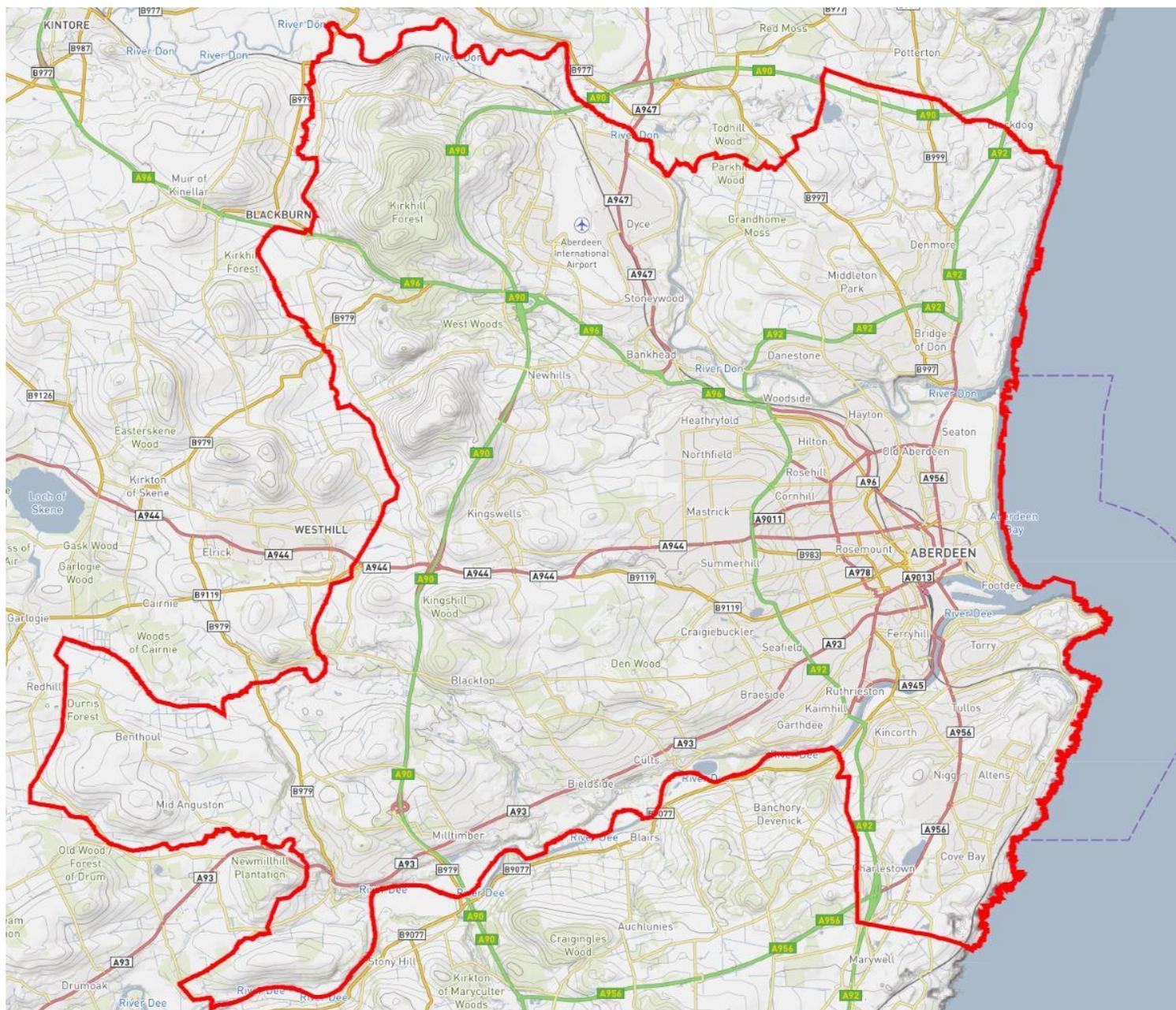
With relation to Section 9(1) of the 2010 Act and having considered all of the information received during the consultation process, officers have concluded that the proposed catchment areas remain appropriate, and that there is no reason to change these.

5. RECOMMENDATION

The proposal for the new catchment areas included a proposed implementation date of 1st August 2023. However, upon implementation, the Council would become responsible for covering the costs of free transport for those eligible to receive it, and there is no budget provision in 2023/24 to cover these costs. It is therefore proposed that the new catchment areas are instead implemented from 1st April 2024, so that budget provision can be made from 2024/25 onwards, to cover the costs of providing free transport.

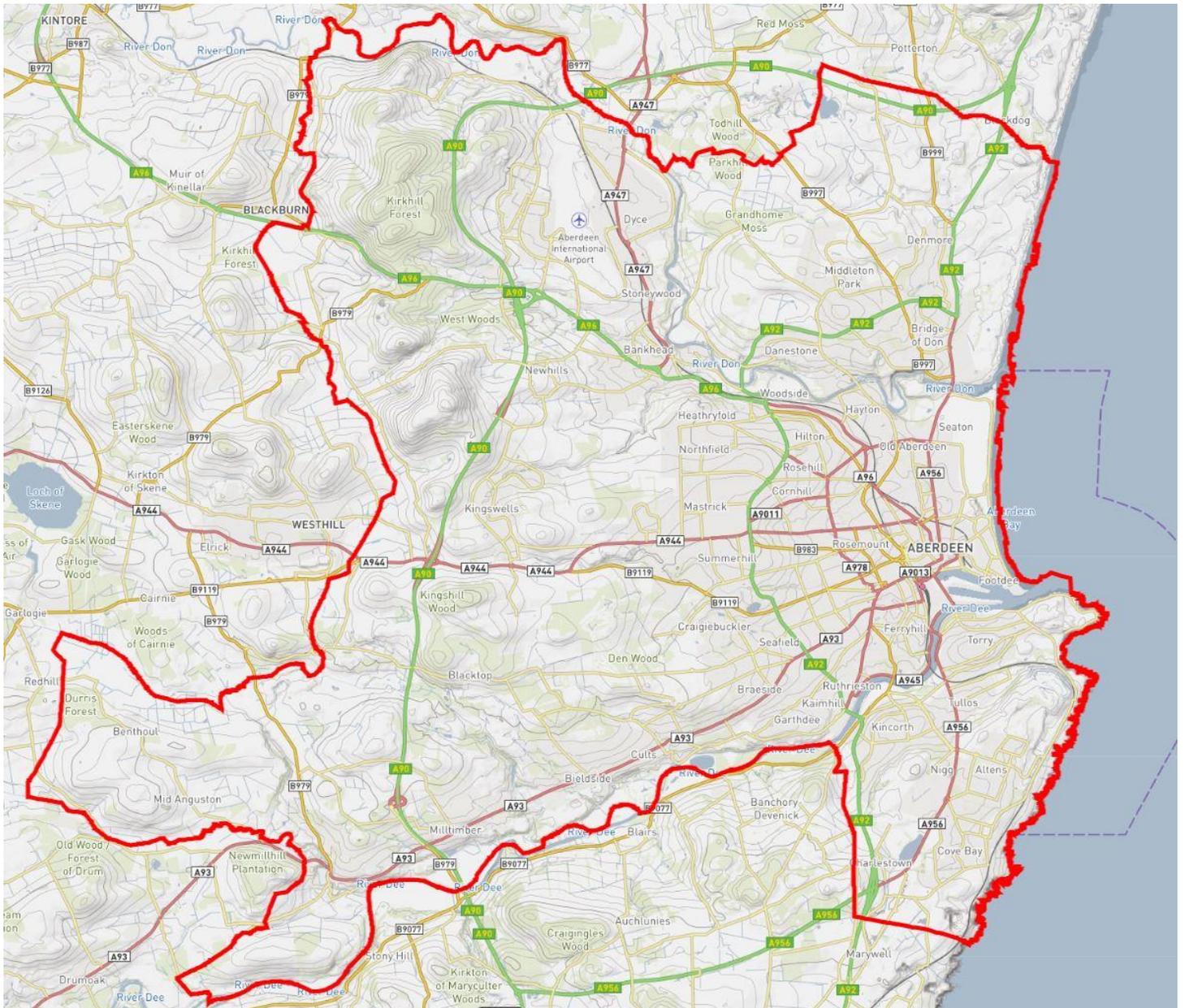
In summary, it is recommended that the Education and Children's Services Committee agrees to implement the proposed catchment areas for Gaelic Medium Education provision, as defined within the maps at Annex A, with effect from 1 April 2024.

Steve Whyte
Director of Resources
May 2023

Map A: Proposed catchment area for secondary GME provision

The boundary of the proposed catchment area aligns with Aberdeen City's local authority boundary, which is indicated by the red line on the map above. The proposed catchment area for secondary GME provision at Hazlehead Academy covers the area of land within this red line.

Map B: Proposed catchment area for primary GME provision



The boundary of the proposed catchment area aligns with Aberdeen City's local authority boundary, which is indicated by the red line on the map above. The proposed catchment area for primary GME provision at Gilcomstoun School covers the area of land within this red line.

REPORT FROM EDUCATION SCOTLAND



Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Aberdeen City Council to establish a catchment area for the existing Gaelic Medium Education provision at Hazlehead Academy, which is bounded by Aberdeen City's local authority boundary;

and

to establish a catchment area for the existing Gaelic Medium Education provision at Gilcomstoun School, which is bounded by Aberdeen City's local authority boundary;

and

that the new catchment areas should take effect from 1 August 2023.

March 2023

Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His 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 set city-wide school catchment zones for Gaelic Medium Education at Gilcomstoun School and Hazlehead Academy. 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 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 at the public meeting held on 8 February 2023 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
- discussions with relevant consultees at Gilcomstoun School and Hazlehead Academy and consideration of further representations made directly to HM Inspectors on relevant educational aspects of the proposal.

Consultation process

2.1 Aberdeen City Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#). The proposal paper was distributed to a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties. The council hosted a public meeting at which they outlined key elements of the proposal. A very small number of people attended. They did not have any concerns about the proposal. Aberdeenshire Council make placing requests to send children and young people to Aberdeen City Council to be educated

through the medium of Gaelic. Their response highlighted that the provisions for learners in Aberdeenshire Council would remain the same.

2.2 Overall those who responded to the consultation supported the proposed catchment areas, but with some further clarifications on issues such as transport. Interested parties were afforded a dedicated area of Aberdeen City Council's website for information and an opportunity to respond to the statutory consultation. This attracted 19 responses, with a small number responding by electronic mail. Almost all of the respondents were in support of the catchment areas. A small number of respondents misunderstood the purpose of the consultation and made discriminatory comments on Gaelic.

2.3 Bòrd na Gàidhlig, as statutory consultee, and Comann nam Pàrant welcome the proposal for a city-wide catchment area for both Hazlehead Academy and Gilcomstoun School. Comann nam Pàrant highlight the resulting educational benefits for children in Aberdeen City Council, as well as families in Aberdeenshire Council. Bòrd na Gàidhlig highlight that the Statutory Guidance for Gaelic Education, 2017 specifies that education authorities may wish to consider demand for Gaelic Medium Education when setting guidelines for placing pupils in Gaelic Medium Education provision. Bòrd na Gàidhlig do not expand further to consider impact on this particular proposal.

Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors elicited a range of stakeholders' views on the educational benefits of Aberdeen City Council's proposals for a city-wide catchment area for Gaelic Medium Education. All stakeholders agree that the council's proposals are of educational benefits but that more clarity is needed on transport arrangements and future placings. Stakeholders considered the proposal to be inclusive in that all children and young people would have access to Gaelic Medium Education, if they wish. This, they felt, has potential to grow the numbers studying Gaelic Medium Education. Stakeholders also hoped the proposal would improve children's continuation with Gaelic Medium Education between primary and secondary schools. Stakeholders welcomed that free transport would be provided. However, they sought clarity on how this would be realised to reduce long travel times for children and young people. Some children and young people currently have to use more than one transport connection to get to the schools with Gaelic Medium Education. Stakeholders also sought details of how children and young people would be kept safe when travelling to school. They sought reassurances that the provision of free transport would be sustained. This was based on stakeholders' previous experiences of free transport being removed for Gaelic Medium Education.

3.2 Stakeholders felt that the educational benefits would be enhanced further if the council had a better strategy for recruiting and retaining teachers of Gaelic Medium Education. Longer term, stakeholders requested that there would be no limits on the number of children and young people learning in Gaelic Medium Education across 3-18 provisions. In this respect, they sought further clarify on section five of the proposal paper.

Summary

HM Inspectors have evidenced that the council has support for their proposal, with a few clarifications. Stakeholders are committed to making Gaelic Medium Education as accessible as possible. The council should clarify a few points highlighted in section three of this report. They should specify the arrangements for free transport and how this will be sustained long term, particularly in times of financial constraints. Children and young people's safety on transport should also be detailed. The council should also consider the

further use of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017 in respect of guidelines for placement requests and enrolments. This would assist in clarifying a few stakeholders' queries.

HM Inspectors
March 2023