Responses to the Committee’s Questions

I am the parent of three children currently in Gaelic Medium Education. Two of my children, primaries 1 & 4, attend the Gaelic Unit at Onthank Primary School, Kilmarnock with my eldest child, primary 7, attending Sgoil Ghaidhlig Ghlaschu. I had no other option but to remove my eldest child from the Gaelic Unit at Onthank Primary when the last fluent Gaelic teacher left as Gaelic Medium Education is no longer being provided. I now send him to school in Glasgow at my own expense as that is his best chance at receiving a good standard Gaelic education. Having taken my concerns to the local authority, East Ayrshire Council last September and not having had them properly addressed, I can see no signs of any improvement. I feel I have no option but to remove my children from Gaelic Medium Education altogether. This will also include my youngest daughter, due to start nursery within the Gaelic Unit at Onthank Primary in August of this year. It may also be pertinent to note that I relocated my family from another local authority purely to enroll my children in GME at Onthank Primary School.

10. How significant a change in Gaelic medium primary education will the Bill deliver? Do you agree these provisions should be limited to primary schooling?

I cannot see what difference the Bill will make to Gaelic Medium primary education. There is a lack of cohesion between local authorities, parents, Education Scotland and Bord na Gaidhlig as to what GME is and how it should be delivered. I approached my local authority to discuss my concerns with the Gaelic provision within the school using guidance from Bord na Gaidhlig and Education Scotland. The local authority dismissed many of my concerns and maintained that GME was being provided even though all of the guidance tells me otherwise. It was also explained to me at that time that the guidance from the relevant bodies in relation to GME was “purely aspirational” and “something to work towards.” If this is accurate then it is a wholly unacceptable risk to take with my children’s education. Without an accepted standard of GME or any real powers to enforce the Bill, including holding local authorities accountable when in breach of the guidelines, I feel the Bill will be ineffective.

11. What are the most appropriate ways for education authorities, particularly those with low levels of Gaelic usage, to promote and support Gaelic medium education and Gaelic learner education? What impact is this promotional work likely to have on the Gaelic language and the number of Gaelic speakers?

My local authority does not promote the provision of GME in East Ayrshire. Although, the lack of fluent teachers and very limited allocated space within the school could possibly be the reason for this. It does create a poor impression of the local authorities support and commitment to GME. When the Unit relocates to the proposed new school in Kilmarnock perhaps this will change.

12. Do you agree that the Bill “will establish a clear process for authorities to follow in considering parental requests for an assessment of the need for Gaelic medium primary education”? Do you agree with the thresholds proposed in the Bill in relation to the assessment of parental requests?
I feel that encouraging parents to petition their local authority to request a GME provision would put further strain on already stretched resources. GME in Scotland is already a “postcode lottery” with varying standards dependent on where you live. The onus should be on local authorities without a GME provision to transport children to neighbouring authorities who can provide it until such time as the situation improves. It would be more productive at the moment to focus efforts on improving already established schools and units, securing good quality teaching staff and ensuring continued commitment from local authorities to the children already in GME.

13. **Under existing legislation, education authorities must have regard to Bord na Gaidhlig’s education guidance when they are producing their annual statement of improvement objectives. What will the requirement in this bill add to this?**

Annual statements are no use if commitments to improvement objectives cannot be enforced. Without enforcement it is unlikely that the requirement in this Bill can improve anything.

14. **Overall, to what extent will the Bill help to deliver the Scottish Government’s commitments to grow and strengthen Gaelic education?**

I feel it difficult to see exactly how the Bill will help. The Scottish Government’s commitment to grow Gaelic Education shouldn’t be the priority. If more focus is put on strengthening the provision in Scotland and ensuring a good quality Gaelic Education through nationalised standards for the children already being educated through GME it will put in place strong foundations on which to build.