Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann)

Response to The Education and Skills Committee “Teacher Workforce Planning for Scotland’s Schools” April 2017

Comann nam Pàrant is a constituted voluntary organisation which represents parents and carers with children in all stages of Gaelic-medium education (GME). Comann nam Pàrant (Dùn Èideann) (CnPDE) is part of a network of local parent groups, which are represented on a national committee – CnP Nàiseanta.

CnPDE welcomes the opportunity from The Education and Skills Committee to comment on issues surrounding the recruitment and retention of teachers for Scotland’s schools with particular reference to GME.

CnPDE would welcome the opportunity to appear before the Committee.

Introduction

GME is a form of immersion education in which according to Bòrd na Gàidhlig’s Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, February 2017 (Statutory Guidance): “Gaelic is the sole language of learning, teaching and assessment in the first three years of primary school. From P4 to P7, immersion education will continue, but at this stage, English will be introduced. From P4 onwards, following the introduction of English, Gaelic should remain the predominant language of the classroom.”

While GME is still a minority education system in Scotland, it is rapidly growing and the education of children through Gaelic is playing an important role in meeting the goals for language revitalisation as found in the National Gaelic Language Plan (2017-22), which is currently at consultation stage. These goals will be impossible to achieve if the numbers of GME teachers are not increased, at primary and secondary (subject) level.

What are the main challenges in relation to teacher recruitment and retention?

Primary and nursery

The expansion of numbers of pupils coming into GME in Scotland is a key objective set by Bòrd na Gàidhlig under the current national Gaelic Language Plan (2012 – 2017), with the aim of doubling the annual intake into GME to 800 pupils by 2017. As such it is a significant component in efforts to increase the numbers of Gaelic speakers in Scotland under the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005.

One of the regions of most rapid expansion in GME has been Edinburgh where a dedicated Gaelic primary school, Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce, was opened in 2013 and the creation of the new school has seen a steep rise in pupil numbers. For example when the school was opened each primary year group typically numbered between 20 and 30 pupils. However, each year since then intake into primary 1 has typically been nearer 60 and it is expected that the intake in 2017 will be closer to 90. There will have thus been a doubling in pupils numbers in primary GME in Edinburgh between 2011 and 2017 (Bòrd na Gàidhlig Education Data 2011 – 2016) with a consequent effect on the numbers of teaching and other staff required.
The aim is for children to reach equal levels of fluency in both Gaelic and English by the end of primary school. This objective, however, must be met against a background where the vast majority of children going into GME will have little or no Gaelic in their family environment. Children should not be removed from immersion for a period of time, such as spending a primary school year with a non Gaelic-speaking teacher. GME requires a continuous development of language skills and vocabulary across all areas of the curriculum in order to achieve the outcome of equal confidence in both languages. This continuous development can only take place successfully if the principles of immersion are followed consistently. Given the principles of immersion, it is a basic entitlement of children in GME that they all have a class teacher who is a fluent Gaelic speaker.

In Edinburgh the expansion in pupils numbers on a year on year basis at primary level has meant that the school has to not only replace any teaching staff who may have departed but also recruit additional staff to teach the classes created by a rising intake. In general, this has proven hard to achieve, and non-Gaelic speaking staff are required to cover at least some of the classes or some of the teaching time. Additional problems are encountered in ensuring Gaelic-medium teaching cover for other absences, both over a shorter or longer term, and for specialist teaching such as support for learning.

Secondary

Secondary GME in Edinburgh is provided at James Gillespie’s High School as part of a broader school setting rather than a dedicated Gaelic-medium school. This encompasses teaching of the Gàidhlig, as well as limited Gaelic-medium teaching in other subject areas. Until recently, there have been two dedicated Gaelic-medium posts within the school, but efforts are currently being made to expand numbers of teaching staff and subject areas covered. However, there are limited numbers of secondary teachers able to teach in Gaelic and it has often proven difficult to recruit suitable staff, even when only seeking to replace rather than expand numbers. In addition, it is not always possible to recruit staff teaching in the same subject area as a departing member of staff which means that efforts to continue immersion within a particular area, and by extension to allow certificated courses other than Gàidhlig itself to be taught through Gaelic, are difficult to maintain.

Do you have views or insight into the process for recruiting the right number of teachers to satisfy the demand for teachers in Scotland’s schools (including the availability of up to date information such as on supply and demand)?

CnPDE considers that a national approach should be taken towards GME staff recruitment, training, allocation and retention. We recognise that teacher recruitment and retention is not an issue that affects only GME, and we recognise that local authorities are responsible for employment and recruitment of education staff in their own areas. However, we continue to believe that GME staffing issues require national level leadership for the following reasons:
GME plays an important role in meeting national goals relating to Gaelic language revitalisation. These outcomes will only be achievable if the principles of immersion are followed.

The infrastructure of GME schools is supported by the Scottish Government through the Gaelic Schools Capital Fund, and annual revenue costs are supported through the Specific Grants Scheme. These funds are a national resource and it is important that they are used to support GME and the revitalisation of Gaelic. Where GME immersion principles are not followed, it could be argued that the funds are not being used for their correct purpose.

There is currently a lack of transparency about the national number of GME staff and the national number of GME pupils. A better understanding of these numbers and how they are projected to change on a national basis would help to inform strategic decisions about the timing of planning and investing in new Gaelic schools.

National level leadership could assist with the sharing of resources and ideas to address similar issues which occur in different local authorities.

Some resources do currently exist at national level to support education authorities in the recruitment and retention of GME staff. For example, the Statutory Guidance suggests that: *Education authorities ... should consider a survey of the teaching workforce to identify the level of interest and ability in Gaelic, and to see if there are any teachers who would like to consider transferring from English medium education to GME. A template for this purpose is available from Bòrd na Gàidhlig. (Statutory Guidance 2.65).*

Teaching staff who wish to transfer from EME to GME can be supported through existing programmes such as STREAP and GiFT. Advanced learners will have different needs from teachers already fluent in Gaelic who have made the decision to work within EME schools. These groups will require different levels of support to encourage them into GME. We are concerned that some local authorities, including Edinburgh, have not been making proper use of these schemes: they may not publicise or promote their availability, support applications from staff, or deploy graduates of these schemes in an appropriate fashion. There is evidence that some authorities are insufficiently proactive and creative in attempting to resolve the Gaelic teacher shortage.

Workforce planning for GME should be factored into Scottish Government’s annual teacher workforce planning which takes place each autumn: *to estimate how many student teachers should be enrolled by the relevant universities in the following year to ensure that we maintain an adequate supply of teachers to meet local authorities’ and schools requirements.* ([http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/Teaching/Staffing](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/Teaching/Staffing)).

A more strategic approach is also needed to ensure that universities offer appropriate courses and maintain continuity of staffing. “Relevant universities” should refer to all universities offering teacher education programmes, and all course providers should be required to demonstrate how they are contributing to the national requirement for a significantly higher number of GME teachers.
Strategic workforce planning is also crucial at the secondary stage to ensure continuity of the immersion experience, the maintenance of fluency, and continuity of subject delivery. New initiatives such as the e-sgoil should be supported as a valuable additional resource for teachers working in secondary GME. This will best be achieved, through concerted Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig action working together with universities to plan for future national workforce requirements.

In order to achieve these aims, CnPDE considers that the Scottish Government and Bòrd na Gàidhlig could take simple steps to support this by maintaining up-to-date information from across all education authorities on current numbers of:

- GME primary pupil numbers
- FTE GME primary teacher requirement
- FTE GME primary teachers employed
- FTE GME primary teacher vacancies
- FTE GME primary teacher roles currently filled with EME teacher
- Gaelic learning support provision

In addition, projected numbers of pupils and teachers for future years are required for forward planning purposes. Support should also be available for all education authorities to carry out a survey of their current teaching workforce to determine Gaelic speaking teaching staff working in EME and whether any could be supported should they choose to make the transition to GME.

As GME infrastructure and annual revenue budgets are supported by Scottish Government, it needs to be clear that GME is being delivered in these schools in line with best practice and national policy goals. This will only be possible if sufficient GME staff exist or will exist to deliver GME in line with the principles of immersion.

- **What are the factors that influence whether teaching is considered an attractive profession compared to other professions by those that might consider a career in teaching?**

CnPDE considers that this question would be best addressed through discussions with university students and school leavers who would provide the best insights into financial and other motivations. With regard to GME specifically, focused discussions should take place with GME high school pupils, and with undergraduates in Gaelic courses.

- **Are there patterns or key reasons why some trainee teachers do not complete courses, or do not choose to go into teaching having qualified?**

As above, this question would be best addressed through discussions with trainee teachers.

- **What is the impact of teacher shortages in certain parts of Scotland or in specific disciplines?**

As outlined above, the effect of teacher shortages directly affects education via immersion as set out in the Statutory Guidance, with potential long-term effects for the fluency of children in GME. Although GME to date has been a great success story, a shortage of qualified fluent staff presents the risk that in future GME will not deliver the outcome of an
increased number of fluent Gaelic speakers. Where Primary GME children are removed from Gaelic immersion for periods of time to be taught by English-medium class teachers, a situation results where there is reduced fluency and failure to meet the goal of equal confidence in English and Gaelic. It is necessary for an urgent renewed emphasis on workforce planning to ensure that immersion can be properly resourced and sustained for children currently in GME and for rapidly growing intakes.

· How effective are the various approaches taken to cover shortages of teachers in schools?
· What factors influence teachers deciding whether to stay in the profession or to leave? and
· What factors influence teachers when deciding whether or not to apply for promotion to senior management/headteacher level?

CnPDE considers that these questions would be best addressed by teaching staff.

Conclusion

CnPDE, along with other GME parent groups in Scotland, fully supports the continued development of GME and would like to see open access to GME for every family who wishes to have their children educated through Gaelic. However, this will require proper forward planning and resource management in relation to Gaelic-speaking teachers to ensure that children in GME are educated in line with GME best practice as set out in the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, and the successful delivery of outcomes as set out in the National GLP 2017-22. Consistent immersion is the only method through which pupils in GME will become fluent and confident speakers of Gaelic, and the only method through which we will meet the national attainment levels and policy goals aimed at revitalising Gaelic in Scotland.

Local authorities responsible for delivering GME must recognise their responsibilities for properly resourcing immersion GME schools and units at sustainable levels; however, this is also a national issue and one that will require national level leadership by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Scottish Government.

References


Scottish Government: http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Education/Schools/Teaching/Staffing