

ANGUS COUNCIL
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
25 APRIL 2000
Gaelic Medium Education
REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

This report highlights a number of possible future developments in Gaelic medium education in Angus.

1 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- a) commends the excellent work taking place in the Gaelic medium class in Kirkriggs Primary School;
- b) notes and approves in principle the potential for future development of pre-fives Gaelic medium education; and
- c) instructs me to seek to identify ways in which some provision for Gaelic can be made for secondary school pupils in Angus.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Members of the Education Committee will recall that Kirkriggs Primary School in Forfar makes provision for a small group of pupils to be taught in the medium of Gaelic.
- 2.2 Reference is made to the meeting of the Education Committee of 24 August 1999 when the delineated area of the Kirkriggs Gaelic medium class was extended to cover the whole of Angus, with specific financial support available to parents furth of Forfar to assist in the costs of transporting their children to and from Kirkriggs. (Article 4 of the minute of the meeting refers)
- 2.3 The current roll of the Gaelic medium class is 9 pupils, comprising:

P1 - 4 children
P4 - 1 child
P5 - 4 children

All 9 of these children are making excellent progress in all their studies and there is a very high level of parental satisfaction with the work of the class.
- 2.4 Specific grant funding continues to be available from the Scottish Executive for 75% of the eligible costs of making this provision.
- 2.5 Understandably parents of children in the Gaelic medium class are looking to the future in terms of secondary education. In addition there is support in principle for the establishment of pre-fives Gaelic medium provision if possible, and enthusiasm for raising the profile of Gaelic medium education in Angus.

3 PRE-FIVES GAELIC MEDIUM PROVISION

- 3.1 Experience with Gaelic medium education in primary schools across Scotland (and also specifically in Kirkriggs) suggests that once the provision is firmly established the levels of interest and support (and the associated pupil numbers) inevitably rise, but that the principal difficulty lies in establishing the provision in the first instance. A similar situation is likely to be encountered in the context of Gaelic medium education for 3 and 4 year olds.
- 3.2 With this in mind, an attempt was made to secure funding in 1999/2000 for a part-time pre-fives Gaelic Development Officer, with a remit to raise parental awareness and to establish a sufficient level of parental support and interest with a view to forming a pre-fives Gaelic medium class in 2000/2001. Unfortunately the then Scottish Office criteria made funding for such a post impossible.
- 3.3 The Gaelic Parents Association (Angus) have indicated that there may be a small number of pupils eligible for enrolment in a pre-fives class in August 2000 whose parents would like them to attend a Gaelic pre-fives class if such a facility were available.
- 3.4 It would not be desirable to form a pre-fives Gaelic class without firm guarantees that at least three or four children (ideally more) were to be enrolled in that class.
- 3.5 Given that the Gaelic medium primary class is housed in Kirkriggs Primary School, by far the most appropriate location for a Gaelic medium pre-fives class would also be Kirkriggs Primary School.
- 3.6 Although there is at present no obvious physical space within Kirkriggs Primary School which would lend itself to conversion to a pre-fives Gaelic classroom, it is believed that a small number of Gaelic speaking pre-fives could be accommodated in the same room as the current Nursery Class.
- 3.7 The annual Gaelic funding application to the Scottish Executive contains reference (in 2000/2001) to the hope that a part-time Nursery Nurse or Teacher can be recruited from August 2000. Recruitment procedures will follow, on confirmation that sufficient children will be enrolled this August.
- 3.8 Accordingly, the Committee is asked to note the possibility that a small pre-fives Gaelic class may be formed in Kirkriggs Primary School with effect from August 2000.

4 PARENTAL AWARENESS RAISING

- 4.1 Linked to the desire to establish a pre-fives Gaelic class there is an associated and understandable hope that a growing number of Angus parents will see the undoubted advantages of choosing a Gaelic medium primary education for their children.
- 4.2 A number of ways in which parental awareness can be raised are being pursued, including:
- a Council leaflet (first produced in 1999) is to be prominently displayed in a range of locations annually in the period November to February (when parents are making decisions about nursery and primary enrolments for the following August)
 - consideration is being given to producing and distributing a poster to accompany the above leaflet
 - the Forfar Gaelic Playgroup is preparing its own leaflet with a view to establishing a wider network of parents (and others) interested in Gaelic medium education
 - two open afternoons per annum are to be arranged in the current Gaelic medium class in Kirkriggs
 - an information evening for interested parents is to be arranged (probably in early November 2000).

5 SECONDARY EDUCATION

- 5.1 When Tayside Regional Council first established the Gaelic medium class in Kirkriggs in 1995, no guarantees were offered to parents about continuation of Gaelic medium education into secondary school.

- 5.2 It is understandable that parents (particularly those of the four pupils now in P5) are now beginning to ask about the possibility of building on the solid Gaelic foundations being laid in primary school - without necessarily expecting Gaelic medium teaching in all subjects at secondary school.
- 5.3 The Council is likely to face practical difficulties (in terms of recruiting suitably qualified teachers), as well as a potential financial burden, in attempting to make Gaelic provision within any of its secondary schools.
- 5.4 At present there is no Gaelic provision (neither for learners nor for native speakers) within any Angus secondary school. Were the Council to be minded to attempt to establish Gaelic at secondary school level, it would seem obvious that Forfar Academy should be the first school on which attention should be focussed - given the natural link with Kirkriggs Primary School.
- 5.5 No progress can be made without at least one suitably qualified teacher; although a recent attempt to elicit interest from Angus teachers in enrolling in a course for Gaelic medium specialist subject teaching elicited no response from secondary teachers, further attempts should be made to identify possible suitably qualified volunteers. In addition it would be possible to highlight the possibility of being asked to undertake some Gaelic teaching to potential secondary teacher recruits to Angus Council (and particularly to Forfar Academy) - thereby, it is hoped, encouraging applications from interested and suitably qualified teachers.
- 5.6 It seem inevitable that this particular issue will remain unresolved for another year or so. However it will be important to have a clear view of the way ahead by January 2002 at the latest. Although there remains a possibility that no specific Gaelic provision may be available in secondary school for pupils completing seven years of Gaelic medium primary education in Kirkriggs Primary School, every effort will be made to recruit a suitable teacher (or teachers) to enable some continuation of Gaelic for these pupils as they move into secondary school.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no specific financial implications for the Council arising out of the recommendations contained in this report.
- 6.2 It is possible that more specific proposals will be brought forward in future, at which times full reports - with costings - will be provided for the Education Committee.

7 CONSULTATION

In accordance with the Standing Orders of the Council, this report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and the Director of Law & Administration.

JIM ANDERSON
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

JAA/RB

