



Education, Skills and Children's
Services Department
**Roinn Foghlam, Sgilean is
Seirbheisean Chloinne**



**Strategy for Gaelic Medium Education:
A Communication for Parents/Carers
June 2020**



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Ro-ràdh-Rationale/ Introduction:

During this time of lockdown and period of transition, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CNES) are very aware that parents who have chosen to educate their children through the medium of Gaelic may be feeling anxious about their decision. The Comhairle will continue to prioritise and support Gaelic Medium Education (GME) during the Recovery Phase of the Covid 19 Pandemic and strive to provide all pupils with high quality learning and teaching experiences. This document provides guidance for returning to school in August 2020 within the current medical and government advice and sets out what GME may look like under a '*blended approach*'. Currently we are working with schools to maximise pupils' attendance in August 2020. It will be an authority wide approach, ensuring consistency and equity in delivery of GME throughout the Western Isles. The aim is to reassure parents that there will be minimum disruption to their child's education.

Carson Gàidhlig? / Why Gaelic? A reminder...

- ✓ Being bilingual helps children become more aware of language, syntax and grammar which is beneficial to literacy and reading ability as well as facilitating the learning of further languages.
- ✓ The evidence suggests that bilingual brains have cognitive advantages and bilinguals are better problem solvers and multi-taskers.
- ✓ Being bilingual offers many career opportunities, particularly in Scotland and the Western Isles.
- ✓ Being bilingual/ multilingual can enable access to different literatures, cultures and heritages, opening a new world to children.
- ✓ Research shows that bilingual children, including those educated through the medium of Gaelic are on par with or outperform children academically than those who are monolingual.
- ✓ Learning Gaelic means that you are preserving the indigenous language of the Western Isles and much of Scotland and with it, culture, heritage and identity.

A' Chiad Chànan is an Dàrna Chànan / The Place of First Language and Second Language:

It is widely accepted that a sound first language facilitates the acquisition of the second. Therefore, we would like to reassure parents that it is important to continue to encourage their child's first language development and not to be worried about confusing their child. Stories, rhymes and songs in their first language are extremely valuable and are recommended. However, it is also important at this young age to expose the child to as much Gaelic as possible to help to nurture their second language. If you have any Gaelic speaking family or friends, please encourage them to speak Gaelic to your child/children as they are an excellent resource. BBC Alba and Radio nan Gàidheal are also excellent and a great way for children to hear Gaelic in a wider context and maximise Gaelic exposure. CNES will continue to update and provide your child and yourself with opportunities access the Gaelic language. There is also a wealth of Gaelic resources to support you which are listed as links at the end of this document.

Ionnsachadh Measgaichte / Flipped Learning:

CNES commits through the 'Flipped Learning' approach to offer daily input of Gaelic language from Gaelic educational professionals. This blended style of learning will be an offer of school based learning, tasks related to this, and on line learning.

All Gaelic Medium pupils will experience high quality learning and teaching through rich talking and listening based activities with an emphasis on Gaelic language development, through literacy tasks, song, rhyme and numeracy work.

Initially, the emphasis will be on Gaelic language acquisition where the teacher will provide engaging opportunities for all P1-3 pupils to extend their Gaelic language skills through Emerging Literacy tasks, talking and listening activities; singing, rhymes, storytelling and drama.

Schools will arrange for activities/opportunities for pupils to engage with Gaelic speakers to ensure that pupils have oral Gaelic opportunities (20-30mins on a daily basis). To ensure children have the opportunity to hear and be exposed to the Gaelic language, Gaelic teachers, language assistants/apprentices and support for learning assistants and will make contact with groups and individuals at home to provide online talking and listening activities when appropriate. Conversational Gaelic and key Gaelic language will be targeted through these sessions.

A wide range of learning opportunities both live and on-line will be provided to enable children to hear and absorb high-quality Gaelic. This may be through Vscene (video-conferencing) sessions or phone calls with individuals and/or small groups. For example 'Buddy links', intergenerational links, etc.

Teachers will also work collaboratively to provide opportunities for children in P4-7 to work alongside P1-3 pupils. E-learning will be used to support this and, conversational Gaelic will be the main focus. Pupils may select an area of focus such as Myself, Getting to Know You, Summer Holidays, Hobbies, etc... This model

is effective as pupils learn very well from each other and develop language best when the subject is familiar and of interest to them. The Gaelic language is then modelled by older pupils for younger pupils and, all pupils will have the opportunity to hear/speak Gaelic.

During the immersion period it is crucial that Gaelic is used/heard whenever possible. There will be rich, play based learning experiences; focusing on Gaelic language acquisition, literacy and numeracy.

Teaching and learning will be a rich experience of talking and listening based activities with an emphasis on Gaelic language development, though literacy tasks, song, rhyme and numeracy work.

Every Friday the pupils will have an additional session with the Gaelic singing instructors who will provide opportunities for P1-3 pupils across the Western Isles to engage in weekly lessons. Song, rhyme and action songs are proven to be an excellent way to learn Gaelic and our Music Instructors have a great wealth of experiences in engaging young children and in facilitating language acquisition. This will further strengthen Gaelic language learning at this time.

'Let's do it Friday' (Dèanamaid Dihaoine) has been extremely successful and has provided opportunities to engage in a wide range of learning experiences; focusing on the wider curriculum. Examples have included Social Studies Quiz, E-Cèilidh nan Òg, Bilingual Virtual sports day, etc. This will continue next session and there will continue to be a bilingual element to the focus Friday events.

CnaG (*Comunn na Gàidhlig*) will also be working in partnership with our schools to provide virtual storytelling and drama sessions to further develop Gaelic language.

In addition to this, schools will be working creatively with Gaelic speaking partners to ensure all pupils have an equitable experience and that there is Gaelic language input on a daily basis.

Additional Support Needs (ASN)

If your child has additional support needs, please be reassured that they will be supported through GME as they would be through English Medium Education. Children with various abilities can become bilingual and indeed are so all over the world. Teachers will continue to work closely with parents to create individual action and educational plans to support any ASN. Consultations and Team Around the Child (TATC) meetings will continue to take place to support and advise the parents and the child's learning and confidence.

Some helpful resources:

- <https://gaelic.education/en/early-years> is also a useful website with links to support home learning and an online messenger service to answer any questions you may have about Gaelic language learning.
- Comann nam Pàrant both local group and national
- Gaelic4Parents - online live support for learning
- Stòrlann's new online support

- <https://www.gaidhlig.scot/cleachdi-aig-an-taigh/> - Bòrd na Gàidhlig online support
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An Smuain Mu Dheireadh / Final thought:

Gaelic Medium Education is indeed a commitment and as you embark on your learning journey together it can be fulfilling and enjoyable. We understand the pressure and anxiety you may feel during this time, so it is important that you keep in touch with your school and teachers to reassure you and advise you along the way. We continue to uphold the importance of flexibility to home education. This is a time to be creative, positive and embrace the new challenges we face; ensuring that Gaelic language is at the heart of what we do.

Please remember that by giving your child the gift of learning a second language you are not only opening them to the advantages of being bilingual in the cognitive sense, but also partaking in the preservation of our culture and heritage, which without its language, may be lost entirely.

Tapadh Leibh!

We would like to thank you for choosing Gaelic Medium and to reassure you that your choice will be upheld and well supported through these uncertain times. Comhairle nan Eilean is here to support you and your children as they progress every step of the way. If you have any concerns, questions or require more support, please contact your school.