



Area Plan for Primary Education

Review of Education Provision

in

Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí

Consultation Response

Closing Date: 17 January 2017

Introduction

Before arriving at the final recommendation on the nature of future provision at Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí, the Education Authority (EA) is seeking the views of those most directly involved at a local level. Therefore, the EA is seeking to engage in consultation with the Trustees, the Board of Governors, staff, parents of current pupils and other interested parties in the local community.

Vision

The aim of the former North Eastern Education and Library Board Area Plan for Primary Education (now Education Authority) is to facilitate the development of a network of viable and sustainable schools that can deliver the NI Curriculum effectively and provide access to a range of educational provision that is appropriate to the needs of the children and young people.

Education Authority Position

The Trustees of the school wrote to the Department of Education (DE) on 17 October 2014 regarding a development proposal to change from voluntary to controlled status.

Development Proposals (DPs) No 450 and 451 were published by the Education Authority (EA) in the week commencing 15 February 2016 in the Mid-Ulster Mail and the Mid-Ulster Observer and in the Belfast Telegraph on 18 February 2016, effectively closing Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí as a Voluntary school and reopening a controlled Irish Medium school of the same name.

On 25 February 2016, the EA put these DPs on hold pending DE advice on their requirement. On 2 March 2016, the EA was advised that the DPs were not needed in line with legal advice received by the Department. The EA's Education Committee agreed that the DPs were to be withdrawn at its meeting on Thursday 10 March 2016.

In July 2016, following a review of the relevant legislation, the Department received revised legal advice to the effect that, alongside an arrangement made under Article 17 and Schedule 9 of the 1986 Order, a DP **is** required where it is proposed to have an existing school recognised as a controlled school.

At a meeting with school representatives on 13 September 2016 DE stated that given the passage of time since the publication and withdrawal of the original DPs, Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí's application to be recognised as a controlled school would be the subject of a new DP from the EA.

Subsequent to this EA Officers met with school representatives to discuss the pre-publication process and it was agreed to initiate consultation with the Trustees, the Board of Governors, staff, pupils and parents of Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí on the following development proposal:

- (i) the transfer of Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí from Voluntary status to Controlled status with effect from 1 September 2017, or as soon as possible thereafter;

Nature of the Education Authority's Recommendation

- (i) The Trustees of Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí wish to explore the possibility of a transfer to controlled status. They wish to do this by making an arrangement under Article 17 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 ("the 1986 Order") transferring the school to the Department of Education (DE) (and ultimately the EA). This may be done in accordance with the provisions of their trust deed; or by a resolution passed by a majority of not less than two-thirds of their members present at a meeting summoned for that purpose. The Trustees wrote to DE on 17 October 2014 advising that this had been agreed. The Trustees of the school should seek and receive the support of the Board of Governors, teaching staff and parents of children attending the school for the proposed transfer. Whilst this has been undertaken before, as stated above, DE have advised that given the passage of time a further consultation should take place.

Article 17 of the 1986 Order describes the process regarding the actual transfer of a voluntary school from the trustees of the school to DE. DE on the date of the transfer recognises the school as a controlled school and places it under the management of the EA and, if appropriate, conveys any estate in land to the EA and may transfer any equipment, furniture or other movable contents to the EA. All staff of the school shall be transferred to the EA on terms and conditions no less favourable than those applicable to them prior to the transfer.

Therefore, as part of the pre-publication consultation on this development proposal, the EA is seeking any objections and/or other comments on the proposed transfer of Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí from voluntary to controlled status from the Board of Governors, teaching staff and parents of children attending the school. (Objections may also be made to DE during the two-month statutory objection period immediately following the development proposal's publication.)

The transfer of the school from voluntary to controlled status will allow the EA to consider and address the significant accommodation issues that are faced by Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí. Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí was founded in 2007 and became an Irish Medium voluntary maintained school when it was recognised by DE in 2009. The Gaelscoil is based at the former Magherafelt Nursery School site on Fair Hill,

Magherafelt while the nursery unit is based separately in Killowen Drive in Magherafelt.

Part of the site on which the Gaelscoil is situated is not owned by the EA, but leased with the current agreement running up to 31 August 2021. The remaining part of the site is owned outright by the EA.

The nursery unit accommodation is owned by the Trustees of the school and it is located on a site currently leased from the NIHE.

The school has an approved enrolment number of 115 and an admissions number of 16. The school also has an approved Nursey Unit with 26 Full Time pupils.

The former nursery School building which is used by the Gaelscoil is generally in poor condition. Not only is the building designed for pre-school children but has previously been deemed unsuitable to meet the needs of Magherafelt Nursery School children when a new build was approved for that school. Some minor alterations have been made to the existing building to make it suitable in the short term and a new two classroom modular unit has been provided to give the school an appropriate amount of teaching space. This is the only part of the school's accommodation which meets the standards of the DE Building Handbook. Not only are the buildings in a very poor condition, but the space available to the school is significantly below that which is recommended. There are serious deficiencies in a number of areas with the lack of a multi-purpose hall and considerable undersized staffroom being the most obvious. Although the building affords the school other spaces which are close to the requisite size as determined by the DE Building Handbook the condition, layout and remote nature of some of these rooms all have a negative effect on the delivery of the curriculum, despite the commitment and best efforts of teaching staff.

Area Planning Impact

Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí is the sole provider of IME education in Magherafelt and the surrounding area and serves the areas of Magherafelt, The Loup, Randalstown and Castledawson. The nearest IME provider is Gaelscoil na Spéiríní in Straw which is approximately ten miles from Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí.

The admissions trend shows that the school is sustainable and has exceeded its admission number of 16 on three out of the last five years (October 2015, Census):

Year	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Admissions	18	15	18	21	15

Table 1: Admissions 2012 to 2016

In addition 21 pupils currently attend the Naíscoil.

Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí has no other sustainability issues.

Publication of a Development Proposal

The EA is required to publish a Development Proposal outlining the proposed changes to the school. The views expressed in this consultation will be forwarded to EA Education Committee members prior to the Education Committee meeting, for their consideration.

Development Proposal Timetable

Stage 1

Pre-Publication Consultation with Board of Governors – 15 November 2016

Pre-Publication Consultation with school staff – 15 November 2016

Pre-Publication Consultation with parents – 15 November 2016

Pre-Publication Consultation will last for a four week period: Tuesday 15 November 2016 to Tuesday 13 December 2016

Pre-Publication Consultation with other affected schools – four week period (excluding Christmas week): Tuesday 13 December 2016 to Tuesday 17 January 2017

EA compiles Case for Change document: including comments received from consultation, and EA response to consultation issues

Approval to publish the Development Proposal sought from EA Education Committee meeting on 9 February 2017

Publication of the Development Proposal in the local press one week after approval given, on 16 February 2017

EA submits completed Case for Change document to DE Area Planning Policy Team

EA writes to affected schools detailing likely impact of the approved proposal

This concludes the EA Consultation Process.

Stage 2

Once the Development Proposal is published the DE two month Statutory Period for Objections begins: **16 February 2017 to 16 April 2017.**

DE Area Planning Policy Team (APPT) compiles its business case, including consideration of objections received: APPT submit its business case to the Minister with a recommendation to approve or reject. (This is a 4-6 week period.)

The Minister considers the proposal on the basis of the business case forwarded by APPT and announces his decision – approximately, **June 2017**.

Implications

If approved, implementation of this Development Proposal to transfer Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí from voluntary to controlled status would take effect from 1 September 2017, or as soon as possible thereafter.

Education Authority

The Education Authority is proposing:

- (i) that Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí transfer from Voluntary status to Controlled status from 1 September 2017 or as soon as possible thereafter;

The EA, in consulting on this important issue, would welcome your comments on these proposals.

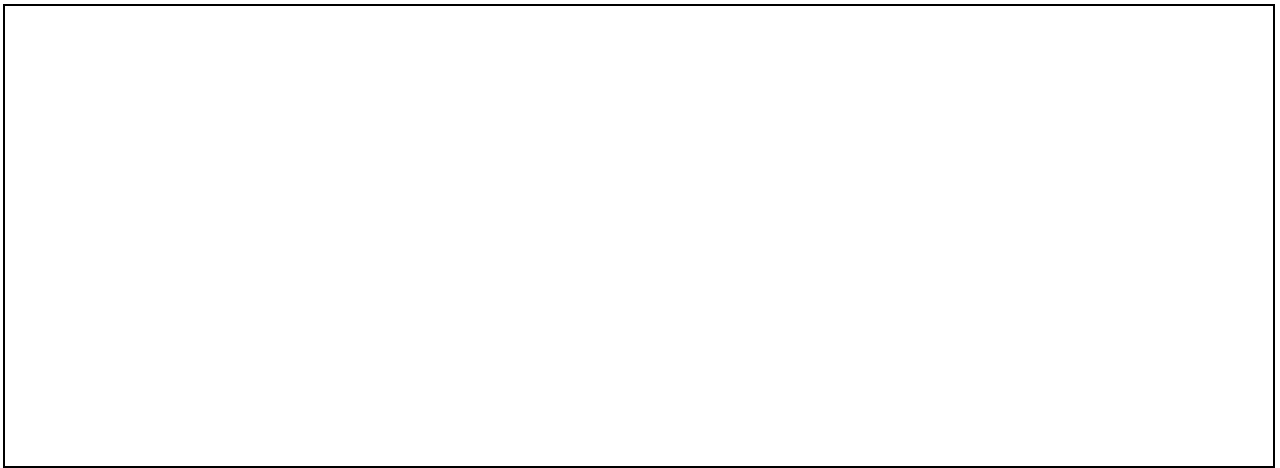
Option 1: Agree with the proposal

Option 2: Disagree with the proposal

Option 1 – Agree with the proposal	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Option 2 – Disagree with the proposal	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Please use the space below to comment further or provide alternative options:



[It should be noted that this process cannot be used to consider specific issues as they currently relate to any individual pupil or adult associated with the school. If for example as a parent you have concerns relating to your child's present education you are advised to contact the Principal. Every effort will be made to address your concerns.]

Equality Consideration

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 all public bodies are obliged to consider the implications of any decisions on nine different groupings before decisions are implemented. The two duties within this Equality legislation include promoting equality of opportunity and promoting good relations between all communities. The equality of opportunity duty requires that the EA shall, in carrying out all their functions, powers and duties, have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- 1 Between persons of different religious belief.
- 2 Between persons of different political opinion.
- 3 Between persons of different racial groups.
- 4 Between persons of different age.
- 5 Between persons of different marital status.
- 6 Between persons of different sexual orientation.
- 7 Between men and women generally.
- 8 Between persons with a disability and persons without.
- 9 Between persons with dependants and persons without.

The Good Relations Duty requires that the EA shall, without prejudice to their equality obligations, have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations:

- 1 Between persons of different religious belief.
- 2 Between persons of different political opinions.
- 3 Between persons of different racial groups.

In light of these obligations do you consider that the proposal to transfer Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí from Voluntary status to Controlled status will impact positively or negatively on either Equality of Opportunity or the Promotion of Good Relations in any way?

Section 75 Category	Positive	Negative	Don't Know
Religious Belief			
Political Opinion			
Racial Group			
Age			
Marital Status			
Sexual Orientation			
Gender			
Disability			
Dependants			

If you ticked any of the above boxes please clarify your reason:

Arrangements for returning your completed questionnaire

Please return the completed questionnaire **no later than Tuesday 17 January 2017** to, either, Gaelscoil an tSeanchaí,

Or, by post to:

Carol Hall
Development Proposal Officer
Education Authority
40 Academy Street
Belfast
BT1 2NQ

Source of Response (Please specify):

Governor _____

Parent _____

Teacher _____

Non-Teaching Staff _____

Teacher Union _____

Other (Please specify) _____