

Education (Scotland) Act 2016

Report by HM Inspectors of Schools to give an independent view of the determination for Scottish Borders Council to establish Gaelic Medium Primary Education from August 2026, unless it would be unreasonable to do so. Scottish Borders Council has designated the assessment area for which it will assess the need for Gaelic Medium Primary Education, as the Tweeddale area.

October 2025

1. Introduction

1.1 This report has been prepared by His Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 2016 (the 2016 Act). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial view of the determination to establish Gaelic Medium Primary Education in Scottish Borders Council from August 2026. This is based on a request received by the council from parents of children under section 7 of the 2016 Act. The request is, as required, from parents of children under school age, whose children have not yet started to attend a primary school. The council has designated the Tweeddale area as the assessment area for which it will assess the need for Gaelic Medium Primary Education.

1.2 Section two of this report sets out brief details of the assessment process and HM inspectors' evaluations on the determination for the council to establish Gaelic Medium Primary Education. This is in accordance with Section 12 and 13 of the 2016 Act. HM Inspectors will use their national expertise to evaluate the potential need for Gaelic Medium Primary Education and draw on inspection findings from the Gaelic and wider educational context in Scotland. This section sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of:

- the details received from the council on the parental request;
- other information received from the council that they, as required, considered during the initial assessment about the demand for Gaelic Medium Primary Education; and
- mandatory factors that must be considered by the council in its determination of the potential need for Gaelic Medium Primary Education. This is in accordance with section 1.52 of the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education 2017.

1.3 Section three of this report summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the need to establish Gaelic Medium Primary Education. Upon receipt of this report, the 2016 Act requires the council to have regard to it in preparing their report on the determination to establish Gaelic Medium Primary Education. The council's report must include an explanation of how it has complied with its duty to secure the provision of Gaelic Medium Primary Education, unless it would be unreasonable to do so.

1.4 The council must publish its final report no later than ten weeks after deciding to carry out a full assessment. HM Inspectors will publish our report on our website at the same time as the council is publishing their final report.

1.5 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- synthesis and analysis of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal;
- discussion with the council and relevant consultees; and
- review of the council's Gaelic Language Plan and other planning processes.

2. Assessment process and HM Inspectors' determination on establishing Gaelic Medium Primary Education

2.1 Scottish Borders Council notified HM Inspectors on 8 September 2025 that they had received parental requests for an assessment of the need for Gaelic Medium Primary Education. This request is for Gaelic Medium Primary Education to be established within the council from August 2026. The council advised HM Inspectors that they had undertaken an initial assessment of this request in August 2025. This evidenced that there is a demand for Gaelic Medium Primary Education. HM Inspectors agree that there is sufficient demand for establishing Gaelic Medium

Primary Education from August 2026. This is based on the evidence that the council has provided HM Inspectors at the time of writing this report. We therefore recommend that the council proceed with establishing Gaelic Medium Primary Education from August 2026.

2.2 The information provided by the council shows parents' interest in enrolling their children in Gaelic Medium Primary Education from 2026 and up to 2031. There are also a few children who have just commenced primary education that reasonably request late total immersion to enable them access to Gaelic Medium Education. The council has set the designated assessment area for primary Gaelic Medium as the Tweeddale area. However, some interested families reside out with the Tweeddale area and would not be within the designated assessment area. The council should revisit their proposed assessment area for Gaelic Medium Education to maximise and enable, all possible and interested enrolments. They should be clear that future setting of catchment areas for Gaelic Medium do not need to be the same as that for English Medium.

2.3 Comann nam Pàrant collaborated with parents to establish a playgroup in Gaelic within the council. They also supported parents by hosting an information event on Gaelic Medium Education. Both these activities have raised significantly initial parental awareness of Gaelic Medium Education. As a result, a group of parents have requested that Gaelic Medium Education be established. The number of parents making this request exceeds that required by Sections nine and ten of the 2016 Act. The council should continue to take forward its statutory duty to promote Gaelic Medium Education with the wider parental body, as required by the 2016 Act. They should continue working with Gaelic and national organisations to access the support they can offer in having a thorough strategy to promote and embed Gaelic Medium Education in the council. Additionally, the council should build on the impact of having a Gaelic playgroup by regularly consulting parents within the council to ascertain if there is a request to make early learning and childcare available through the medium of Gaelic. This would be in line with the consultation already taking place for the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. The provision of early learning and care settings, as part of Curriculum for Excellence, through Gaelic total immersion would ensure three-year old children access Gaelic Medium Education. This would be beneficial in raising attainment and closing gaps longer term.

2.4 The council has a statutory Gaelic Language Plan, 2023-28. This is the council's first plan. It commits to demonstrating 'equal respect for Gaelic and English regarding any bilingual services and resources.' The Gaelic Language Plan details a partnership arrangement with Edinburgh City Council through which children and young people may access Gaelic Medium Education. The plan specifies that this partnership arrangement is not attracting interest from parents. For example, in 2022-23, there were no learners travelling to Edinburgh for Gaelic Medium Education from the council. Parents' current interest in Gaelic Medium Education shows a significantly increased response to accessing Gaelic Medium Education. Should local-based Gaelic Medium Education be established, it potentially improves all children's and young people's access to this option in education.

2.5 The council has some approaches in place to enable stakeholder involvement in implementing new projects for Gaelic. This includes a steering group. Clearly, this determination to establish Gaelic Medium Education has accelerated the pace at which the council is required to implement Gaelic Medium Education, should this go ahead. HM Inspectors recommend that parents should be fully consulted and involved in planning the future implementation of Gaelic Medium Education. The council has begun to engage other education authorities on how best to deliver Gaelic Medium Education. They should continue widening the scope of this research to consider all-Gaelic schools, as well as Gaelic Units and associated staffing structures, including promoted posts. Parental evidence shows an interest in considering all-Gaelic schools. The council's determination in how Gaelic Medium Education is delivered should make Gaelic Medium Education an attractive, long-term option that results in year-on-year growth in enrolments.

2.6 In 2017, Bòrd na Gàidhlig published Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education asking that councils create catchment areas, and consider establishing guidelines on transport, travel,

enrolment, admissions and placing requests for Gaelic Medium Education. Going forward, the council should take forward these duties to enable equal and equitable access to Gaelic Medium Education. They should have a clear policy on how they will support equity through the provision of free and safe travel and transport for learners to their Gaelic Medium Education provision. This is particularly pertinent should there only be one Gaelic Medium provision within the council. It would be important for the council to complete relevant impact assessments, including children's rights, and equality and human rights impact assessments. The council shared with HM Inspectors some of their initial planning towards a full assessment. The council is aware of the importance that their future plans are taken forward in strong collaboration with parents as part of a planned, strategic approach to developing progressive Gaelic Medium Education.

2.7 The council is aware of the high-quality and distinctive approaches to Gaelic Medium Education detailed in the Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education, 2017, and best practice identified through inspections. In taking this forward, the council are still to explore how dedicated funding from Scottish Government can be accessed.

3. Summary

3.1 HM Inspectors have assessed and evaluated Scottish Border Council's determination of the potential need for securing Gaelic Medium Primary Education within the council from August 2026. We have drawn on our national expertise to evaluate the potential need and possibility of securing Gaelic Medium Primary Education. This has taken account of the wider parental, Gaelic and educational context in Scotland. HM Inspectors recommend that Gaelic Medium Primary Education should be set up in Scottish Borders Council for August 2026. This will support the council's ambition to advance their statutory Gaelic Language Plan. In this report, HM Inspectors have summarised our evaluation of a few mandatory factors for the council to consider for implementing successfully Gaelic Medium Education.

**HM Inspectors
October 2025**