

**Coimeas air Taic do Phàrantan ann an Sgoiltean far a bheil Ionnsachadh  
tro Mhion-chànan**

**Comparison of Support for Parents in Schools where Learning is through a  
Minority Language**

Report for **Bòrd na Gàidhlig**, November 2012

**Executive Summary**

1. In commissioning this research, Bòrd na Gàidhlig sought:
  - examples of best practice in support for parents of children learning through a minority language, from preschool to high school;
  - examples of best practice regarding support for parents in Gaelic-medium education;
  - examples of best practice regarding parental support which could be adopted for the promotion and development of Gaelic-medium education.

At the international level, information was sought in other minority language communities by email from individuals, from the Mercator minority language dossiers, and from books and journals in the University of Edinburgh Library. In addition academics and organisations concerned with minority language education and bilingual education were consulted, and data and reports sought on the internet. Response was slow: it also emerged that the topic has not received much consideration: this was confirmed by well-informed contacts. The search for ideas in this context was extended as far as possible within the timescale to include majority-language enclaves and bilingual education.

Within Scotland, information was taken from officials with responsibility for Gaelic development in local authorities; from pre-school groups, primary and secondary schools; from branches of Comann nam Pàrant and school parent councils; from a tutor for the Gaelic4Parents Homework Help, and individual academics and personnel in language organisations. Communication was by means of telephone conversations, email and post. Desktop research was carried out on pre-school, primary and secondary inspection reports (from 2006 onwards), on school websites, Scottish Government and Education Scotland publications, and sundry documents.

2. **Examples of best practice of support for parents – other minority language communities:**

Examples of best practice were found in the Basque, Catalan, Welsh and Irish communities, and in the French immersion education in Ontario. It has to be noted that in the language communities, and especially Basque and Catalan, there are demographic, political and financial advantages which render the immediate circumstances of the languages in the education systems dissimilar to that of Gaelic. Nevertheless, there is no reason why practices should not be examined for whatever practical application or adaptations may be possible.

Good practice appeared to be evident in the following categories of support for parents in respect of the following minority language education systems:

**Parental involvement, support groups/forums, home-school links:** Basque, Catalan, Welsh, and French language immersion in Ontario;

**Language learning:** Basque, Catalan, Welsh, and Irish;

**Activities using the language:** Basque and Welsh;

**Homework:** Catalan and French language immersion in Ontario;

**Information and language promotion:** Basque, Catalan and Welsh;

**Language ethos:** Basque, Catalan and Welsh

### 3. **Examples of best practice of support for parents – Gaelic-medium education**

The salient feature of the results of this aspect of the investigation was the differential provision of measures of support – the absence of uniformity even within individual council areas.

The following suggest good practice: particular examples are given in the full report.

**For homework**, apart from the universal citation the Gaelic4Parents Homework Help chatline: homework clubs, meetings, courses, classes, workshops, all drawing stronger often recommendation when provided with Gaelic-medium activities for children.

**Opportunities to learn Gaelic**, apart from general advice, information about online and provision of take-home resources such as ‘Basic Gaelic for Parents’ and CDs, the recommendations were: Ùlpan classes (although often reckoned pitched beyond immediate parental needs); tuition of simple words and phrases; ‘word and action’ workshops; reading courses; family ‘Bookbug sessions; summer ‘Family Weeks’ which were especially praised.

**Gaelic-medium Activities**, apart from Fèisean, Mòds, Sradagan and ‘family days’ – the summer ‘Family Weeks’.

**Promotion and information** undertaken by the holders of posts such as the CnaG post of Gaelic-medium Promotion Coordinator in the Western Isles, (part-funded by CnES); the Comann nam Pàrant Parental Advisors scheme; Gaelic Community Development Officers in Highland Council; the Early Years Development Officer in Argyll and Bute.

**A Gaelic ethos** evident in the promotion and encouragement of the use and learning of the language, through extra-curricular Gaelic-medium activities, participation in Mòds and Fèisean as well as its spoken and written prominence around the school and in school publications and online presentations.

**Local, communal support** provided by branches of Comann nam Pàrant: in particular the branches in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Portree.

#### 4. **Examples of best practice regarding parental support which could be adopted for the promotion and development of Gaelic-medium education**

Amongst the evidence gathered, the following appear the most worthy of consideration. They comprise examples from other minority language education systems, and practice within Scotland which can be recommended for wider – if not universal – implementation. The implications of each are summarised in the main report.

**Language learning.** The Welsh language courses ‘Welsh from the Cradle’ and ‘Welsh for the Family’ could be examined to see if something of similar design might be appropriate for introduction in the Gaelic context – it was a common observation that Ùlpan courses do not teach the register or vocabulary of Gaelic which is suitable for use with babies or young children. However, the Ùlpan courses were undoubtedly well-regarded for learning beyond that level, and in this context initiatives promoted by the Portree branch of Comann nam Pàrant initiatives appear useful: the Ùlpan training undertaken by S6 pupils at Portree High School, who subsequently taught classes in Skye, and the obtaining of discounted Ùlpan fees for Portree childminders. In respect of advice given to parents of children in Gaelic-medium education, the strategies for educational development in the home advocated to parents by Canadian Parents for French, to stimulate both the learning of French and bilingual literacy, might have some relevance. All the summer Family Weeks were praised enthusiastically and, were it to be apparent that further provision would receive applications, development of the facility would be worthwhile.

**Homework.** In the short term, any additional means of support as listed under best practice in the Gaelic-medium context would be helpful, as suits particular circumstances, although, as with other means of support, more uniform measures of proven efficacy would be preferable. At present, a facility similar to the ‘Homework Toolbox’, designed and made available by Canadian Parents for French might be useful for older pupils.

**Information and promotion.** In Wales, the Twf and Mudiad Meithrin Field Officers and the Mudiad Meithrin Development Officers give intense support to pre-school groups, from a very early age; this sort of work is developing in Scotland, and it is to be hoped that it could be expanded along the Welsh model. An aspect of this form of support which became apparent in the course of the investigation – not so much for good practice as for underuse of the facility – was the relative absence from school websites of links to the full range of information and advice available, and in particular specific encouragement of Gaelic-speaking parents to speak Gaelic at home.

**Gaelic-medium activities.** This is another aspect of the summer ‘Family Weeks’ which won much praise.

5. **Supplementary note: significant support needs observed by a minority of respondents**

The following points were raised by a few respondents: provision for children with additional support needs, and the uneven nature of the national provision of support such as tutors for classes, and personnel to set up and run pre-school groups, in areas where there is a primary school with Gaelic-medium education.

## **Comparison of Support for Parents in Schools where Learning is through a Minority Language**

### **1.0 The purpose, scope and conduct of the investigation**

- 1.1 In commissioning this investigation in February 2012, Bòrd na Gàidhlig sought an outcome with the following:
1. examples of best practice in support for parents of children learning through a minority language, from preschool to high school;
  2. examples of best practice of support for parents in respect of Gaelic-medium education;
  3. examples of best practice regarding parental support which could be adopted for the promotion and development of Gaelic-medium education.
- 1.2 The research comprised a survey in two parts. The first was at an international level, to obtain information on the needs and support for parents in the context of education through the medium of minority languages, and also a consideration of any relevant matter in literature on bilingual education. The second, within Scotland, reviewed the needs and the support currently available for parents of children in Gaelic-medium education.
- 1.3 The investigation commenced in February 2012; it was scheduled to finish at the end of July. However, the gathering of information proved to be slower than anticipated, due to pursuit of informed contacts at the international level and slow responses or non-responsiveness to enquiries, generally. An extended deadline for this report was set for the end of October.

## **2.0 The importance of education through the medium of a minority language**

- 2.1 For minority language speech communities seeking to nurture their language, education through the medium of the language assumes a role of fundamental importance, and this has been recognised in official, international declarations (UNESCO, 2003; OSCE, 2012), and also for Gaelic within Scotland (Scottish Government (1) 2010; Highland Council, 2012). Though the minority language may be the sole or dominant language in the home and community, the school provides instruction on wider knowledge, and the world beyond. Inevitably, the medium through which this is disseminated becomes associated with the information and understanding, and major languages – with large speech communities, use by national governments and international organisations, and swift adaptation to the era of electronic communication – have an advantage. If succeeding generations of children of a minority language speech community are educated through their country’s major language, the minority language will appear to them to have diminishing relevance to their lives and aspirations. Education through the minority language is thus important to offset the disadvantage: it demonstrates that the minority language and its community have legitimate status and a claim to recognition in the wider world.
- 2.2 It is also important for two other reasons. First, where the minority language is spoken widely in the community, it reinforces and extends young people’s habitual use and vocabulary. Second, in locations where the minority language may be under pressure from the encroachment of the majority language, the school may be one of the few domains – or even the only one – where its regular daily use is established, and the school thus becomes an important local centre for the nurture and development of cultural activities with which the language is associated or for which the language is a prerequisite, and also for other activities to which use of the language can be extended.

### **3.0 The importance of parents to children's education, to education through the medium of a minority language, and their own need for support.**

- 3.1 The importance of the role of parents in their children's education is recognised internationally. Parents can support their children through the quality of the home life, by providing them with learning experiences outside school, by attention to their daily preparation and attendance, by interest in and help with homework, and active engagement with the work of the school. This involvement has been advocated by the Scottish Government (Scottish Government (2), 2011; (3), 2012).
- 3.2 However, parents themselves may need support: they may not be able to fulfil all aspects of the role advocated, and thus would be less likely to provide the level of support to their children which would optimise their children's academic success.
- 3.3 In the context of education through the medium of a minority language, the development of a child's abilities in the minority language is enhanced if it is used in the home – by at least one parent – and restricted if it is not. If the sole language of family relationships is the one which is evidently the majority language of the country, children quickly confer it greater prestige and importance. However, parents who can use the minority language to support their children's general education, in the ways outlined above, will validate the use of the language as well as reinforcing their linguistic attainment.
- 3.4 Should neither parent be a speaker of the minority language, they have an additional need for support: they may lack literacy in the language, or may be lapsed speakers, or learners, or have yet to start learning. This gives rise to concerns about being unable to help with homework, or to provide sufficient opportunities for the use, learning and development of the language outside the school.

## 4.0 The current situation in Gaelic-medium education

- 4.1 Comann nam Pàrant reports: ‘(M)ost of the children in Gaelic-medium education come from homes where neither parent speaks Gaelic’ (Comann nam Pàrant [Nàiseanta], 2007). Others have parents who are lapsed speakers or are not fully literate in the language. Schools and Comann nam Pàrant have found that parents of children in Gaelic-medium education have concerns typical of those of parents of children receiving education through the medium of other minority languages, viz. doubts about their ability to support their children’s learning through the language. There is also anecdotal evidence that such concerns have caused parents to opt for English-medium primary education for their children after Gaelic-medium pre-school, or to transfer them to English-medium during the primary years. There is a need, therefore, to provide such parents with the confidence, tools, and knowledge of practices which will reassure them. The obstacles which parents face were confirmed in the report: *Gaelic Education: Building on the successes, addressing the barriers* (HMIe, 2011).

## 5.0 Conduct of the research

- 5.1 The investigation required gathering of information about support for parents at both national and international levels.
- 5.2 At the international level, information was sought and received about support for parents in other minority language communities by email from individual contacts, known and recommended, from the Mercator minority language dossiers, and from documents and books in the University of Edinburgh Library. In addition, academics and organisations concerned with minority-language education and bilingual education were consulted, and data and reports sought on the internet.

It proved difficult to gather much information directly about support for parents in other minority language communities, partly because of lack of, or slow, responses to enquiry, and partly because there was evidently not much to relate. It may be that the latter was the reason for the former: the issue may not be, at present, a matter of immediate consideration in many minority language communities. It was certainly the case that desktop research and a trawl through journals found little of relevance, and this paucity was confirmed by a former employee of CILT (‘very difficult to track down information on this’), and Professor Colin Baker of Bangor University (‘the research base is not strong’).

- 5.3 In respect of the Gaelic community in Scotland, it was taken from officials with responsibility for Gaelic development in local authorities; from pre-school groups, primary and secondary schools; from branches of Comann nam Pàrant and school parent councils; from a tutor for the Gaelic4Parents Homework help, and individual academics and personnel in language organisations. Communication was by means of

telephone conversations, email and post. Desktop research was carried out on pre-school, primary and secondary inspection reports (from 2006 onwards), on school websites, Scottish Government and Education Scotland publications, and sundry documents.

- 5.4 Desk research was carried out on, and contact made or attempted with, a number of other minority language communities, to ensure that the search for information was exhaustive. This included Eastern Europe, Germany (immigrant communities), South America, mainland USA, Hawaii, and New Zealand. However, where the education systems were sufficiently developed for teaching through the minority language to be established, there appeared to be no evidence of parental concerns or needs, nor of forms of support, which were different to those in the reports recorded above.
- 5.5 Desk research was also carried out on the role of parents in bilingual education: one example – that of the teaching of French as a second language in Canada – seemed to reveal some ideas which might be worth consideration in the Gaelic context, and is thus included in this report.

## 6.0 Other minority languages

### 6.1 The question of comparators

- 6.1.1 Initial consideration was given to the question of comparator minority languages: languages of comparable status and condition according to measures of sociolinguistic factors such as size of language community, the extent of state support and minority language education, etc. It might be expected that innovative ideas most implementable in the Gaelic context would be found – if they exist there – in a comparable language community.
- 6.1.2 Studies by the author (Galloway, 1995) and Jones and Morris (2008, adapting data from Williams, 2005) seem to indicate that Irish would be perhaps the best comparator to Gaelic. However, while the process of such comparative studies offers greater knowledge and understanding, it would be inappropriate to cleave to the findings too closely. Every minority language has a unique sociolinguistic profile: geographical and political factors alone are significant. Moreover, comparative studies involve ‘snapshots’ of the languages’ condition, irrespective of the progress of innovative or deficient practices which may alter an aspect of the condition. It follows that, in seeking examples of good practice in support for parents, comparator language communities are not of prime importance in the search, although they could ultimately benefit from the implementation of a discovered practice which is useful to one of them.
- 6.1.3 In casting more widely for information, certain limits have to be drawn. The languages which should be considered in the investigation are those which already have a degree of recognition within an education system, whether private or public. The education system should be modern and attuned to consideration of contemporary educational issues. Some ‘minority language’ circumstances to be discounted are those which involve a major one, used by a large, migrant, sustainable speech community, located in a particular area within a state wherein another major language predominates – for example, Spanish in the south-western United States, on which the literature concerning ‘support for parents’ deals with the problems of monolingual parents themselves, rather than their ability to help their children’s education. It also seems most likely that ways of supporting parents which might be useful or adaptable to the context of Gaelic-medium education would be found in societies where the outlook and social consciousness of the society is most akin to that of Scotland. All of this suggests that minority languages within western democracies are the most relevant.

## 6.2 Reports on other languages

### 6.2.1 Basque in the Basque Autonomous Community

There are three models of school, classified as models ‘A’ (almost all teaching is carried out in Spanish; Basque is taught as a subject); ‘B’ (teaching is carried out half in Spanish and half in Basque; both languages are thus medium as well as subject); and ‘D’ (almost all teaching is carried out in Basque; Spanish is taught as a subject; this model is designed primarily for students from Basque-speaking homes). The following refers to the ‘D’ stream.

There is little online in English which is relevant to the investigation: most of what there is concerning parents focuses on political and administrative issues, and parents’ rights, rather than aspects of their parental role in the educational process. However, a detailed response was provided by Berritzegune, an innovation centre for school teachers in the Basque Autonomous Community.

In general, the information emphasised strong parental involvement. ‘With regard to the curriculum, parents’ representatives decide the different educational (language and non-language) programmes the school takes part in. For example, parents decide whether the school will take part or not in the Ulibarri program for the promotion of the use of Basque, or in a European project.’ Continuous contact amongst families, children and school teachers was reported: ‘(T)here is daily contact through the school-agenda, weekly individual meetings with parents, every three months meetings concerning progress and annual assembly with all parents of each class.’ Parents’ representatives also apparently have a role in deciding which extra-curricular activities will be offered and in which language they will be taught: it is acknowledged that these are important in reinforcing the informal registers of Euskara, and ‘some parents’ are willing to contribute to these activities. There are also ‘follow-up activities in the community’. Parents’ associations, together with the school and other public authorities, organize leisure/learning activities to promote the use of Basque in the neighborhood, village or area. The annual calendar of those cultural activities is printed in the school-agenda of each pupil. ‘There are plenty of activities directed specifically to parents’ motivation, participation and involvement.’

In a further response, it was stated that there is ‘a diagnosis of knowledge and usage of Basque by parents of the whole school community, using a specific procedure called “Branka”, which gives us statistics and percentages’. According to this data, various actions are pursued. At initial meetings of parents under the auspices of the schools and local authorities, a Basque and Spanish summary of Alma Ada Flor & Colin Baker’s book: ‘A Parents’ and Teachers’ Guide to Bilingualism’ (2000) is distributed or the contents explained. Parents are also told of recent research on language transmission has been carried out in the BAC, and the results are presented to raise consciousness. Every year there an effort is made to motivate parents to take part in the normalisation plan of the school. For different categories of parent – monolingual Spanish, or

bilingual, there are additional materials. A catalogue of Basque books and other products is distributed by local authorities every year before Christmas, and teachers analyse and comment on their various suitability for children. Parents are brought into classrooms as story-tellers, as are famous people (TV presenters, sportsmen, singers, writers) to motivate parents to use/learn Basque. The method used in the classroom to promote the knowledge and use of Basque is explained, and the Basque Library Project distributes materials which promote knowledge amongst both parents and children. Parents are encouraged to become members of the Parent Board for the Basque Normalisation Plan. Communications from the schools are always either bilingual or in Basque, and workshops are organized to teach parents a minimum level of Basque.

Sometimes the linguistic background of pupils in certain classes are diagnosed (based on a questionnaire adapted from Baker, [2000]), and a range of specific information about the family and family language usage of all those pupils is obtained: number of family members, language of communication at home, use of various media, participation in sport and church. On this information more specific proposals are made to the parents, such as: workshops for parents on family transmission; workshops on how to promote the use of Basque at home and what other strategies and resources can be used; audiovisual and written materials directed to parents to raise their consciousness on language and cultural transmission; involving parents in corpus planning, e.g. as informants to collect old sayings, songs, lexicon, or publishing a local dictionary; involving parents in collecting traditional children's songs, teaching them to other parents, and producing a CD for distribution. These last and several more of the same order would appear to be support in the form of providing parents with opportunities for intense cultural involvement, rather than directly helping their children. The report concludes with recognition of the role of the internet resources, blogs or pages as facilities where pupils, parents and teachers 'can share information, education, opinion or activities'.

It is apparent that in support provided for parents, the Euskara normalisation programme can call on resources commensurate with a larger speech community, and official government policies and finance, and it is also plain that significant input from parents is anticipated.

### 6.2.2 Breton

Diwan, the federation of Breton-language schools in Brittany, reported that there has been no research on the needs of parents of children in the schools, or on whether the support provided follows any particular model or philosophy. The support comprises: teaching – in some schools – childhood vocabulary to parents; suggesting Breton language classes to families – classes in schools, or offered by ‘associations’ in cities – usually one evening per week; there are internet lessons with a new method – “Edubreizh” – which some parents follow. In respect of the best methods of supporting parents, the response focused on the provision of classes in Breton, or training sessions which would lead to the attainment of fluency. One method described as ‘very efficient’ comprised a year of evening classes followed by a one- or two-week summer immersion camp for families – the children being engaged in Breton-medium activities, while their parents are on the immersion course.

### 6.2.3 Catalan in Catalonia

Having ten million speakers across four countries, Catalan is not a minority language in the normal use of the term, for while it is so in relation to Castilian Spanish, it is the majority language in Catalonia, with more speakers there than there are Danish-speakers in Denmark. Nevertheless, the dominance of Castilian over Spain as a whole requires dedicated language policies to ensure the nurture and maintenance of the language.

Several attempts were made to contact potential respondents in Catalonia, including emailed enquiries translated into Catalan, but none elicited a reply. However, a report on the SCIPD study visit in 2009 was referred to.

Catalan is the *lingua franca* of the state education system: the main language used for learning and communicating in the education process; Catalan-medium education is the rule rather than the exception. The Catalan Government is keen to ensure that incomers and their children become Catalan speakers. For the children of incomers, the education system provides Reception classrooms (*Aules d'acollida*). When children start going to school, if they are unfamiliar with Catalan, they will spend several hours a day for their first few months in an *Aula d'acollida*, where they learn enough Catalan to undertake normal classroom learning as quickly as possible. Parents without Catalan are in the position of many parents elsewhere whose children are being educated through the medium of other languages: they do not speak the language themselves, and thus they themselves require support if they are to support their children’s learning of the language, and education through the language.

To a great extent, this is helped by the pervasive use of Catalan, and the Government’s measures to strongly encourage non-speakers to learn, and to provide opportunities to do so. But the education service also recommends that parents be actively involved in

their children's education through each school's Association of Parents of Pupils which organises and provides information and guidance, including matters such as out-of-hours childcare and extracurricular activities, or the school council, or through being a class representative. A glossary of frequently used terms and phrases is available, and a variety of methods and opportunities for learning Catalan. All letters to the home are written in Catalan, and if the parent cannot understand it, it is expected that the child will translate.

The Catalan education service has been able to provide all this with the backing of a majority of the population and with full fiscal funding. There would appear to be a comprehensive strategy to provide support, though in cautious qualification it might be noted that no evidence of the views of the parents has been found.

#### 6.2.4 French in Ontario

Information was provided by Canadian Parents for French (hereafter CPF). The immersion teaching of French – and of junior school topics and senior school subjects through the medium of French – in Ontario presented itself during desk research and appears to be – so far as parents are concerned – analogous to minority language education. Where teaching through the medium of a majority language is freely available in a community where there are few speakers, it is likely that many parents will require help in supporting them. This is borne out by evidence found in this community that parents felt unable to help with homework because of their inability to speak French (Eagle, 1996; von Mende, 2000, cited by Hart *et al.*, 2010). Eagle’s recommendation (‘mirrored’ in the ‘Yes, you can help!’ booklet, first published by Canadian Parents for French in 1996) was that children should read to parents in French even if the latter do not understand, and that parents should read to their children in English. Eagle noted the positive effect of this on their children’s attitude to work. CPF’s main advice develops this as an emphasis on parental engagement with their children’s learning: the parents’ primary role in supporting second-language acquisition is seen as providing a model of or teaching effective work habits, strategies, and problem-solving skills and, most importantly, developing the children’s first language skills by reading to them (in English – the first language skills being transferable to second-language acquisition and vice versa), and promoting reading and writing as an attractive activities.

The more recent study by Hart *et al.* in 2010: ‘Needs Analysis: French Immersion Homework Help Program’, was undertaken at the request of Canadian Parents for French. ‘(T)he most common resources that parents and their child(ren) currently use to assist with homework in French are the internet, including general use of online materials; online translators; French search engines; online dictionaries, French lesson sites, and pronunciation sites, as well as print dictionaries.’ Two thirds of parents felt that at least some additional support was required, and most of the teachers surveyed agreed. ‘The most common additional resources flagged by parents as those which would be helpful for homework help were more or better resources (e.g. online resources, improved access to resources, print resources, and audiovisual resources) and help beyond the classroom in the form of after-school programs, tutoring, and extracurricular activities where the child(ren) can practice French outside of the classroom context.’ Nearly all the teachers surveyed thought that parents were involved in supporting their children to a ‘medium’ or ‘high’ level, and most reckoned that better internet resources, better school library resources, and a ‘how-to’ guide for parents without French language skills would be helpful. Hart *et al.* recommended ‘that the Ministry consider piloting an internet-based homework help service for French immersion students and their parents’, similar to an existing one for mathematics, which itself could be translated into French to meet a particular need discovered in the survey.

In the wake of this research, the Ontario Ministry of Education developed the online 'French as a Second Language (FSL) Homework Toolbox', which includes audio files in French and English; video clips demonstrating instructional strategies; a reference guide for specific topics; a list of French language learning websites; and general tips for learning French.

### 6.2.5 Frisian in Friesland

The emphasis in Friesland is on bilingual rather than Frisian-medium education: according to the Mercator report ‘The Frisian Language in Education in the Netherlands’ (Ytsma, J., 2005; *et al.* 2007, 2010), ground-breaking state language policies implemented thirty years ago were nevertheless insufficient and the results ‘are lagging behind European standards’. Since 2004, Frisian can be used in pre-school education on a voluntary basis; in primary education, since 1980 Frisian has been an approved teaching medium in all grades and an obligatory subject throughout the primary years; in secondary education it has been an optional exam subject since 1970 and obligatory since 1993 in the lower years of secondary school. Although Frisian is ‘approved’ as a teaching medium in primary education, this does not mean that it is used for all lessons: where there is Frisian-medium teaching (in 20% of schools) it is only for a day or half-day per week. In the earlier years of secondary school, the compulsory Frisian classes take up only one hour per week: ‘the position of Frisian as a subject remains marginal due to the limited time investment.’

The Fryske Akademy stated that the perceived needs of parents in Friesland are ‘more or less in line with those described in Colin Baker’s ‘A Parents’ and Teachers’ Guide to Bilingualism’ (2007), which addresses parent’s need for information and answers to their questions. However, the main concern of all parents is their children’s expected good command of Dutch by the end of primary school and commensurately at the end of the ‘obligatory school attendance (16/17 years)’.

The SFBO (Sintrum Frysketalige Berne-Opfang) organisation has been very successful in setting up new provisions for pre-school education and day-care centres which are either bilingual or Frisian-medium: it trains the pre-school teachers and involves parents through parents’ evenings – ‘showing them best practices, offering them reading materials and creating together a good atmosphere of reading, singing and playing games’. There is also the Tomke project, which aims to improve the reading skills of pre-school children and is a useful aid for parents – it has an interactive website which provides reading materials, songs, etc, and addresses basic questions which parents may have about raising children bilingually. It is a long-term project, with a different theme each year, differentiated for each pre-school cohort.

With respect to Frisian in primary schooling, it was reported that there are parents’ evenings in every school, but no standard requirement for them, as there is variation in the density of the Frisian-speaking population (most are in rural areas) and also in education ‘styles’. Presentations and discussions in which the language development theories of Jim Cummins and Virginia Collier comprise the only support mentioned in the context of the secondary school. On the question of support groups for parents, it was reported that there are none: ‘in 1990 we have tried to set up such support groups at local level, but we failed’; the other evidence suggests that this was due to lack of interest. ‘There is no special structure for parents & school.’

There is, therefore, little Frisian-medium education, and it would appear that parents are not energetically demanding more than there is. It seems that the support they do receive in the form of advice, materials, and the TOMKE reading scheme, suffices for their engagement in the Frisian side of their children's bilingual education.

### 6.2.6 Galician

. The investigation's brief questionnaire was circulated among infant, primary and secondary school teachers and the responses collated at the University of Santiago de Compostela. There was not a demand for support from parents, but it is recognised that many cannot help their children because of 'their lack of training, especially in vocabulary'. This applies to both Galician speakers – due to 'an ignorance of the formal (academic) register of the language and the technical language' – and Castilian speakers, who have a 'general ignorance' of Galician. There has been only one known Galician course for parents, offered by a school in Corunna in 2008. Few strategies have been adopted to establish links between home and school to help children in their language learning and development – none on the part of the authorities: those links which do exist are the work of 'Teams of Linguistic Normalization' or '.....by some teaching teams of some schools of early childhood education (infant education)'. There have been a few public meetings at which groups of parents have demanded Galician-medium education for their children, and there are certain 'associations of mothers and fathers', but teachers had no information about any groups or forums to support parents to further their children's education.

### 6.2.7 Irish

Information was provided by the Comhluadar organisation, which was founded primarily as a support group for parents who are raising their children through Irish, as the children's first language and one of the languages of the home. Such children are a minority in Irish medium education, and Comhluadar has extended its advice services to include families whose home language is English.

Comhluadar perceive parents' concerns as: not being able to assist with homework; not being able to understand notes and instructions sent home; apprehension lest the development of their children's competence in English will be damaged or delayed. The parents' primary needs are the provision of language classes and information. Homework also needs to be explained, although there is a danger that direct translations can undermine the work of the school. Parents need, it was reported, a clear explanation of the methodology and philosophy of immersion education, and an understanding of the commitment they should make:

*In Ireland this frequently doesn't happen as individual schools are responsible for 'recruiting' parents. The vast majority of parents (English speaking) choose Irish-medium education as the 'easiest' option for their children to acquire Irish. Parents need to be aware of their role in assisting that language learning, by attempting to use or learn the language themselves, the success of which depends on their commitment, and in this respect they should be made aware that they have a role in assisting learning, by attempting to use or learn the language themselves. Some schools have excelled at this; however, it isn't uniform throughout the schools.*

Overall, it appears that the schools' provision of support is uneven. (No distinction was made between schools in the two umbrella organisations: Scoileanna Gaeltachta, which are schools in the Gaeltachta – the Republic's designated Irish-speaking areas – and Gaelscoileanna, which are Irish-medium schools established by public demand outside the Gaeltachta, in North Ireland and throughout the Republic.) Individual schools have adopted a number of strategies, which variously comprise homework clubs in school, Irish classes for parents, parent and toddler groups, coffee mornings, out of school extra-curricular activities, family events and summer camps, but 'there is no single body promoting such support'. Comhluadar supports school communities in these strategies, and itself operates as a nationwide social network for families, providing advice, organising monthly social events, holidays, weekends, and youth clubs.

There is not a national organisation of parents similar to Comann nam Pàrant for Gaelic, although an attempt is being currently made to establish one. Most schools have a Parent Council.

Comhluadar reports that, while there has been, through its work, some successes in maintaining intergenerational transmission, 'the majority of those who have gone through Irish-medium education choose the same path for their children rather than choosing Irish as the home language'. (In this context Ó hÍfearnáin (2007) found a

desire for bilingualism amongst Gaeltacht parents, which is at odds with government incentives to promote Irish as the sole language of Gaeltacht homes, and also a significant divergence of opinion on how much Irish should be used with children at home and at school to achieve Irish-English bilingualism.)

In its review of Irish-medium education in Northern Ireland, the Department of Education Northern Ireland found that very few parents in the province have sufficient Irish to support their children's education through the medium of Irish (Department of Education Northern Ireland [1], 2012). A later document proposing a literacy and numeracy strategy for Irish-medium education recognised the need for 'more support and advice for parents to encourage greater involvement in their children's education, particularly programmes to equip parents in supporting their children's education through the medium of Irish' (Department of Education Northern Ireland [2], 2012). Parents should be made aware of online resources; there is a need to develop a wider range of materials such as reading schemes and 'supporting materials'. 'Programmes are also needed to support those parents who have little of no Irish in supporting their child's learning of Irish and English and their development of numeracy through the medium of Irish' (ibid).

### 6.2.8 Sami and Finnish in Sweden

Uppsala University reported on circumstances in Sweden and Finland. There are, in Sweden, very few examples of education through the medium of a minority language, and schools which do deliver it have a legal requirement to provide at least 50% of the lesson time in Swedish. Personal experience of a Sweden Finnish school revealed ‘various problems’, one of which is a falling roll, and apparently the bilingual and often trilingual character of many Sweden Finnish homes ‘makes the situation a bit more complicated’. No particular educational model or philosophy is applied in the minority language education in Sami schools in Sweden and Finland, although there is an ‘indigenous philosophy in the teaching of Sami, in respect of traditional knowledge’. All of the minority language schools try to gather information about minority language education and best practices, but it is not felt that they have much to contribute in their turn.

Many parents who enter their children for minority language education lack the skills in the language to be able to help them. Some schools offer evening classes or other methods of learning and in some cases, such as the Imari Sami Language nest in Finland, parents learn the language basics diligently and can support their children effectively. The Sami Language Centre in Sweden has compiled a ‘Sami Knowledge Package’ containing (within the one package) games, rhymes, songs, booklets etc in the three Sámi languages as well as in Swedish, for free distribution to pre-school units and families. The Swedish Finnish youth organisation is in the process of producing an information ‘briefcase’ for parents, with similar content and information about raising children bi- and trilingually; it was thought that the inspiration for this came from Wales.

The Sami Language Centre is also involved in cognitive behavioural therapy which has been developed for adults who spoke Sami in their childhood but today have difficulties in using it because of negative experiences and memories. The therapy helps these people to come to terms with this and, little by little, to begin to use the language again.

All the minority language schools try to have strong links with the homes, ‘but it is not always so easy’. At least one Swedish Finnish school has an active ‘home-school association’ which organises after-school and weekend ‘festivities’ and club activities for the children.

Such parents’ support groups and forums as there are appear to be concerned not so much with educational detail as with rights, identity, and the importance of language. There is apparently a growing irritation with the authorities amongst young adult members of the minority language groups in Sweden; they have gained collective strength through online contact and discussion.

It is considered that minority language education in Sweden and Finland still has much progress to make: there is still a lack of public knowledge about bilingualism, about raising bilingual children, and the value of multilingualism in the modern world. The respondent recalled meeting teachers from Sami schools who had visited schools ‘in the Hebrides’ and had been impressed and inspired by the Gaelic-medium education they observed there: ‘I’m afraid that we have more to learn from you than you can learn from us.’

### 6.2.9 Welsh

Information was received from The Welsh Language Board, Mudiad Meithrin, the Association of Welsh-Medium Schools, Parents for Welsh-Medium Education, and Iaith (the Welsh Centre for Language Planning).

Some of the responses deal specifically with the pre-school education, or primary or secondary education: and are best presented under these headings, along with other information referred to.

#### Preschool

Support at this stage involves the coordinated actions of several bodies; much of the following information was provided by Mudiad Meithrin.

Twf ('Growth') is an organisation founded by the Welsh Language Board which provides advice and practical help to parents – antenatal and postnatal for the first year, the aim being to encourage parents to transmit the Welsh language to their children. It has part-time Field Officers who work with Welsh-speaking health visitors, midwives and postnatal clinics to promote the advantages of Welsh-medium education – whether to promote Welsh as the language of the home and the first language of the child (where both parents are Welsh-speakers), or to encourage the parents to take a bilingual approach (where one of the parents is a Welsh-speaker). The Twf Field Officers also work with the Welsh for Adults Centres (q.v.) and other hosting organisations to provide, for the increasing number of parents who have no Welsh, a course – 'Welsh from the Cradle' – for both parents and babies which specialises in 'baby-talk' Welsh. This is different to a basic Welsh language course, even one designed for parents with young children, because it teaches vocabulary and songs associated with a baby's everyday activities – being bathed, being fed, etc. There is a website with parents' resources, news, advice and information. The Twf Field Officers also provide 'taster' parent and toddler group sessions, the particular aim of which is to win over parents who – not being Welsh-speakers – may lack confidence that they could contribute to the Welsh-medium pre-school provision. The Field Officers provide information about the support parents can obtain from them, and from other organisations it works with.

Edwards, V., & Newcombe, L.P. (2003) carried out an initial evaluation of the Twf project, and found that it was 'extremely successful': they concluded that '(I)t will be important for the Welsh Language Board to disseminate the experience of this highly innovative project to speakers of other lesser-used languages.' Irvine *et al.* (2008) investigated the impact of Twf on decisions regarding language transmission within families. The effect was positive, whether in helping parents' decision to use Welsh in the home, or reinforcing the decision when already made. They also found evidence which suggested that families with particular demographic, linguistic and personal characteristics should be targeted to receive more intensive Twf input in order to increase the likelihood of Welsh language uptake in the home. However, a further

finding was that promotion of Welsh as the language of the home and the first language of the child by health visitors and midwives was not so strong: although there was some commitment to the dissemination of Twf resources, there was a general apathy towards discussing language transmission with parents. Action points on this were among a number to be considered by the Board.

Mudiad Meithrin is a voluntary organisation specialising in Welsh-medium early years provision. It has Field Officers operating at a local level who recognise where there is a lack of a Cylch Ti a Fi (parent and toddler) group for children up to two years old. There will be coordination with the Twf Field Officers. The Mudiad Meithrin Field Officers find a location – often in a Welsh for Adults Centre (q.v.) – establish the group, and oversee it for between one and two years, after which the community takes it over and runs it. There are about five hundred of these parent and toddler groups. The group leaders are mostly volunteers; parents pay a fee of £1.50 per session which contributes to the hire of the premises and the cost of refreshments. The Field Officers also provide information about other, and later, forms of support. Hodges (2012), in an examination of parents' motivation for choosing Welsh-medium education for their children, found evidence that such parents felt supported:

*'Friends' educational choice was clearly a strong influence on research participants, especially those within the local 'meithrin' (Welsh-medium nursery) sector. The 'Ti a Fi' groups also proved very influential as they created well-established parent social networks and certain parents chose Welsh-medium education for their children en masse as a group of committed friends who created a clear support network for each other. According to a non-Welsh-speaking mother from the secondary sector, 'we all decided to send our children to the Welsh school together at the same time'. Hodges (2012)*

In addition, Mudiad Meithrin has Development Officers, with a wider remit, working at a county level: there are up to 3 per county. Apart from being the line managers for the Field Officers and their parent and toddler groups, they oversee the establishment and running of Cylchoedd Meithrin (playgroups), of which there are about 500 altogether, for children aged 2 to 4 years. The Cylch Meithrin playleaders have appropriate qualifications and are paid.

Mudiad Meithrin also provides support for the 60–65% of parents who are not Welsh speakers through advice and encouragement about language use in the home (for example, where one parent has Welsh and the other English). It endeavours to make sure that parents understand that Welsh-medium education is important to the child, and all groups are kept in touch with the next stage: the parents are kept informed that they can stay on the Welsh-medium ladder: headteachers from the local Welsh-medium schools visit the groups. (In contradiction, the spokesperson for Parents for Welsh-Medium Education feels that too often pre-school group parents are not made aware of the subsequent stages.) Mudiad Meithrin also promotes classes available for parents at

Welsh for Adult Centres and other locations: one of the courses is Cynllun Cymraeg i'r teulu (Welsh for the Family) a two-year course which is designed to support parents and carers who attend the groups. It aims to enable non-Welsh speaking families to use the Welsh language across the range of domestic conversations commonly spoken in the home. Welsh for the Family also seeks to foster children's interest in books from the youngest age possible, to help children to learn to read with ease after starting school, to enable parents to promote their children's educational and general development through the medium of Welsh, and to facilitate access to *cylch* activities for non-Welsh speaking parents. Linked to these are the 'Welsh for the Family' family learning days, when children play while adults have tuition in basic Welsh, which they then use with their children in arts and crafts and singing sessions.

Mudiad Meithrin also operates referral schemes across Wales which can support children with additional needs in the *cylchoedd meithrin*. It has a subsidiary, Siop Mabon a Mabli, which 'specialises in selling Welsh and bilingual products, which are ideal resources for parents who are Welsh learners and want to learn Welsh with their children'.

Welsh for Adults Centres are funded by the Welsh Government, and provides the location and tutors for a range of Welsh language courses, which parents can take on discounted fees. Apart from Welsh from the Cradle, and Welsh for the Family, there is the five-stage Welsh for Adults course, each stage being passed by examination. (The Welsh for the Family course is at a level equivalent to the first, elementary stage of Welsh for Adults.)

#### Primary and Secondary School

Compared to the pre-school stage, support for the parents when their children are at school appears to be less coordinated and integrated; it might be expected that this would be more difficult to achieve, given the uneven geographical distribution, the progressive increase in the scope and intensity of the education, and the greater diversity of Welsh-medium provision. Iaith described the Welsh-medium provision, and therefore the support available to parents, as 'patchy'. There are Welsh-medium primary schools, but also primary schools with Welsh-medium and English-medium streams; there are Welsh-medium secondaries, but also secondaries with varying degrees of Welsh-medium provision.

Bwrdd yr Iaith Gymraeg / the Welsh Language Board provided a response before it ceased to exist at the end of March 2012. Two broad categories of parents' needs were distinguished: first, information to parents about Welsh-medium education to enable them to make an informed choice about sending their children to a Welsh-medium school, and second, resources to enable parents who do not themselves speak Welsh to help their children. The Board had concentrated on the former, and had produced two leaflets of information, and its website also provided advice for parents of children in

Welsh-medium education on ways to maximise their children's learning: reading, listening, talking on a variety of subjects, showing an interest in their homework.

For parents without Welsh, the Board provided a Homework Support Line, providing help by phone, text or email. (According to other sources, it was little used.) The Board also founded Twf, which gives advice on the advantages of bilingualism and raising children bilingually. The Board advised that, in general, schools with Welsh-medium education endeavour to establish good, cooperative relationships with parents and will communicate bilingually where required: sometimes this will include homework instructions in English as well as Welsh. "However, this – and any other measures to support parents' understanding of what and how their children are doing at school – is left to individual schools."

Parents for Welsh-Medium Education/Rhieni dros Addysg Gymraeg (RhAG) provided a detailed account of views on the provision of support for parents. In general, almost all aspects of the support are found to be deficient. A 'patchwork landscape' of local differences were highlighted, borne principally of the variation in density of Welsh-speakers and continuing changes effected by inward migration; of developments of an *ad hoc* nature rather than 'proactive national and meaningful planning'; of dependence on the special efforts of proactive individuals such as head teachers or adult language tutors; of the lack of 'a specific body which has direct responsibility for organising and supervising the 'language journey' of a child and his/her parents.' The need for a reported 'comprehensive information pack', for greater inclusion of parents who are not Welsh speakers; for greater consideration of the problems such parents have with secondary school homework. With respect to support which is given, it was felt that there should be 'much more joined-up thinking' in national planning and delivery; that schools should receive guidelines; that, on a general level, headteachers should receive training in promoting immersion learning and bilingualism. In respect of support that found approval, that of Welsh for Adults Centres were prominent: it was noted that some have tried to assist parents, for example hosting occasional maths lessons to introduce the mathematical terminology. The new 'Welsh for the Family' course is welcome. It was reported that a number of schools do strive to include parents in their children's work, and ensure that they receive sufficient information about homework, clubs and Welsh language family days. The best support, it was felt, is 'effective, honest and consistent communication with parents', besides which the general tenor of the advocacy could be described as more of all aspects – in quantity, quality, consistency, planning and implementation.

The spokesperson for the Association of Welsh-Medium Schools thought that parents might need support to help with their children's homework, but didn't really think it an issue: the homework helpline was not much used and in less than one percent of cases has difficulty in coping with homework been cited as the reason for withdrawal from Welsh-medium education. (Most of the dropout from Welsh-medium education occurs at the transition from primary to secondary.) Parents do need information, a dictionary,

an open-door policy at the school and parents' evenings. No particular model or philosophy is employed in support of parents: the focus is on the needs of the child, which vary: there is a range of degrees of fluency, and the parents' needs are met on an *ad hoc* basis. In terms of links between home and school to support children in their language learning, the email access to assessments was cited, and the 'taster' courses in Welsh offered by a few schools. As a supportive group, it was reckoned that Parents for Welsh-Medium Education is very effective.

Jones and Wilson (2012) and Burrowes *et al.* (2011) describes the support given by Latecomers Centres and teams of Athrawon Bro (Community/Area teachers) to immigrant non-Welsh-speaking families. The Centres were established in west and north-west Wales in the 1980s and 1990s; they are funded partly by the local authority and partly by the Welsh Government, with the purpose of helping latecomers to Welsh-medium schools to gain fluency as quickly as possible. "(T)here is also a well established system of support structures for pupils and their families in collaboration with the schools", although the nature of the provision varies from one centre to another. The range of provision includes, for parents, awareness evenings, encouraging family participation in social events and language 'taster sessions'; Welsh evening courses (with pupils) and interacting with providers of Welsh for Adults courses; 'after-care' for pupils; encouraging participation in Urdd (League of Youth) activities; delivering a 'parents assimilation programme' (in Môn, Gwynedd, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire), and ongoing support from schools in form of feedback and support (e.g. homework). There is, as yet, only one Latecomers Centre which deals with pupils in secondary education.

Hodges (2012), also found evidence of a supportive relationship between Welsh-medium education schools and parents:

*'Pastoral care was of paramount importance, especially as the majority of parents were non-Welsh-speaking. Such parents commented on the 'special relationship' between teachers and non-Welsh-speaking parents, as noted by a non-Welsh-speaking mother in the primary sector: 'We were very worried because neither of us could speak Welsh and nobody in the family spoke Welsh but teachers took the fear out of the situation. They showed us simple ways we could help our children practice Welsh phrases at home and tackle homework in Welsh too.'*

## **7.0 Review of support for parents in the reports on language communities**

### 7.1 Basque and Catalan

Of the communities investigated, the most organised and thorough involvement of parents is found in those of the Basque and Catalan languages. The model of support is one focused on language learning: information, learning materials, classes and workshops, childcare and extra-curricular activities are available, but in return there is an expectation that parents will show dedication to the proliferation and intergenerational transmission of the language, that they will take part in the life of the school, and if they do not know the language, they will learn it and use it. There is practice here that Gaelic-medium education might aspire to, but in both cases crucial advantages obtain, in comparison with the Gaelic context: Basque and Catalan are indisputably the national languages of their homeland; they have much larger speech communities (a majority speech community in the case of Catalan); and they have commensurate financial support backed by a semi-autonomous government. These circumstances give the relationship between parents, language and school an extra dynamic, and instances of good practice there are probably not so applicable to Gaelic-medium education.

### 7.2 Breton, Frisian, Galician, Sami and Finnish

The circumstances of these languages and the measures of support stand in marked contrast to those of Basque and Catalan. For Breton, support for parents appears to be low-key, and has followed the straightforward observation that they should have information and be able to learn the language, and so attendance at classes is advocated, along with summer camps which provide tuition for parents and Breton-medium activities for the children; the model of support is one of language-learning. As reported, Frisian-medium education is only partial, except in some pre-schools and day-care centres, and parents seem to be content that their children have a bilingual education with Frisian much the lesser-used medium. As summarised at the end of the report on Frisian, the support parents receive in the form of advice, materials and the Tomke reading scheme appears to satisfy parents: they have good links with the schools, but no other support is requested, apparently.

With regard to Galician, support for parents would appear to be non-existent, and there is evidently no demand for it, despite it being known that many are unable to help their children with their homework. Neither, according to account received, do there appear to be strong links between home and school, nor vocal and established parent groups or forums. In the cases of Sami and Finnish in Sweden, measures to provide support to parents are piecemeal. Some schools do offer an evening class, however, and although strong links with home are not universal, it may be presumed that, in more than the one instance reported, there are after-school, weekend, and club activities. It was

acknowledged that the support for parents falls short of what is provided for Gaelic-medium parents in Scotland.

### 7.3 French in Ontario

In this case, the parents' only concern, formerly, was that their inability to speak French prevented them from helping their children with homework. The direction of support, apart from maintenance of strong links between home and school, has been to encourage parents to engage strongly with their children's learning. The emphasis is on developing effective work habits, strategies, problem-solving skills, and the use and enjoyment of language, whether French or English: the language skills being transferable. This is now supplemented, in response to parents' requests, by a well-developed online 'Homework Toolbox'. There would certainly appear to be ideas here which might be considered in the context of Gaelic.

### 7.4 Irish

There would appear to be a mismatch of the parents' concerns and what, from the supportive point of view, they are perceived to need. Parents' common worries are reported as: not being able to help with homework (through lacking ability in Irish); not being able to understand school communications (as before); and apprehension about their children's competence in English. In respect of the success of Irish-medium education, they are perceived as needing language classes, information about and explanation of immersion education, and an understanding of the commitment they should make to it. The support provided by the schools is not uniform, but includes, variously, homework clubs, Irish classes for parents, pre-school provision, extra-curricular activities, family events and summer camps; Comhlaudar and other organisations also provide some of these last-named.

It would appear than in the relationship of parents with Irish-medium education, there is a recognition that there are issues to be resolved and solutions to be sought. The non-uniformity of the provision of support, the current attempt to set up a national parental body akin to Comann nam Pàrant, and the apparent uncertainty on the part of some parents – particularly significant in the Gaeltacht areas – about the use of Irish in the home, would seem to indicate that examples of good practice might be found there in future, rather than at present.

### 7.5 Welsh

Although there are obvious difficulties and contradictory judgements, the consideration, commitment, planning and development which is evident in the early years support provided for parents in Wales, would appear to offer examples of good practice. Undoubtedly not all efforts are successful, but there is an established procedure of early contact with parents, the building of continued relationships, and

recruitment of children in cohorts which progress through the Twf and Mudiad Meithrin pre-school groups (of apparently assured continuity) into primary education. Coordinated with these are the 'Welsh from the Cradle' and 'Welsh for the Family' courses, which are tailored to parents' and children's language development needs. Support through primary and secondary schooling is evidently less straightforward and uniformly provided.

## 8.0 What parents in Scotland need, and what support there is

8.1 The evidence provided here was taken from respondents in branches of Comann nam Pàrant and Parent Councils, from Gaelic-medium pre-school groups and schools, Care Commission and HMIe inspection reports, officials in local authorities, individuals who are or have been involved in Gaelic-medium education or parent support, and the Gaelic4Parents Homework Chatline.

### 8.2 Method of collecting of information and opinion

A response from all Comann nam Pàrant branches was sought, by email and telephone: this required some pursuit. An even representation was attempted, according to the location of schools: where there was no branch of Comann nam Pàrant, a Gaelic-medium parent member of a parent council or, *in extremis*, a recommended parent, was sought.

Pre-School Groups and Schools: information was gathered by the following procedures. For 0–3 groups, sgoiltean àraich, primary and secondary schools with Gaelic-medium education, the initial course was to send brief questionnaires to all; there was no expectation of a 100% response, nor would there sufficient time to pursue it, but it was felt that all should have the opportunity to respond. The replies received were then supplemented by telephone enquiries to non-responding schools which have a website indicative of a Gaelic ethos, and to others recommended by HMIe personnel and local authority Gaelic officials. A few more were targeted to obtain a representative distribution.

All Care Commission and HMIe reports on Gaelic-medium pre-school groups and schools were consulted online for references to support for parents.

Gaelic development or Gaelic-medium officials in local authorities were consulted by telephone or email for information, opinion, and recommendations.

One of the teachers who provides online help through the Gaelic4Parents Homework Chatline was interviewed by telephone.

### 8.3 **Information and opinion gathered.**

This is presented below as follows:

Comann nam Pàrant, Parent Council, Pre-school Groups and Schools, local authority officials: under local authority headings; section 8.4

Care Commission and HMIe reports; section 8.5

Gaelic4Parents Homework Chatline; section 8.6

### 8.4 **Comann nam Pàrant, Parent Council, Pre-school Groups and Schools, local authority officials.**

#### 8.4.1 **Comhairle nan Eilean Siar**

##### Comann nam Pàrant

Enquiry found that there is no active branch of Comann nam Pàrant in the Western Isles, but Comann nam Pàrant (Nàiseanta), funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, has established a network of Parental Advisors throughout the Western Isles, who receive remuneration (an hourly rate) to promote Gaelic-medium education at coffee mornings and other local events throughout the Western Isles. There are, at present, three in Lewis and one in Uist: the post in Barra is currently vacant.

The email address of only one Comann nam Pàrant contact – in Barra – was available, and a parent to whom the investigation enquiry was forwarded replied that the branch is ‘in extended hibernation’, and was unable to provide any representative information.

In the absence of a local branch of Comann nam Pàrant, the chair of the Back School Parent Council was interviewed. It was reported that the Council had met the night before, and there had been some discussion about cuts in the Comhairle’s budgets, and the effect this would have on support for parents. There was praise for the facilities available: there are ‘lots, if people are prepared to look’. The school is helpful, providing advice, Gaelic homework diaries, bilingual maths homework throughout the primary years, a Gaelic-medium after-school club for P1–P4 with a mixture of homework and play; there is a session for P1 and P2 parents one morning per week, on homework, at the ‘Learning Shop’ in Stornoway; Acair provides the ‘Sure Start’ packs and the school with free books. The homework helpline is used, but here one issue had been raised: sometimes the advisors have a Gaelic accent unfamiliar in Lewis, which causes minor difficulty.

There being no Comann nam Pàrant branch in Stornoway, nor listed contact in Lewis, the parent council of the Nicolson Institute was approached, but no response could be elicited.

### Pre-school

At the pre-school level, the Barra Children's Centre reported that parents have 'really benefited' from attending playleader-led sessions throughout the 0–5 pre-school years: they and their children learned words and phrases together and 'had fun doing so'. These sessions are currently bilingual but are working well, and apparently have appeal for families 'outwith our Gaelic-medium stream'. Parents would like more support with this, and the Barra Children's Centre includes it in its plans, although this has been the case before, and it has proved difficult in the past to find a suitable format and personnel to deliver it.

Cròileagan Dhùn Sgealair reported that nearly all children registered have Gaelic at home, although it was not thought that it was the main language spoken. English-speaking parents have shown some interest in learning basic vocabulary and phrases, but it was reckoned that the biggest problem was that they were unable to attend classes or were uninterested in doing so: it was speculated that a simpler way of learning – from home, or from a website, might be preferred.

Cròileagan Lacasdail reported that what parents without Gaelic needed, and what they sought support for, is the learning of everyday words and phrases which they could use with their children. This the Cròileagan is providing: parents 'are not asking for much more at the moment', but some have enquired about classes and they have been given information. The parents are very supportive of the Cròileagan. Some have Gaelic but don't use it. The Cròileagan also teaches the children and parents songs and games, and they extend the children's experience by taking them for activities outside – though this is partly because the building used is 'is not very suitable'. The children take 'Storybags' home for the period of the school holidays.

### Primary school

Sgoil a' Bhac referred the investigation to the primary department: pupil support was not regarded as an issue for the secondary. The school felt that the main need was the ability to help with homework and, to meet this, a weekly session has been provided for the parents by the Comhairle's Community Education service. However, some are unable to attend, being at work during the session's allotted time, and uptake of this facility was described as 'not great'. The school does recommend the Gaelic4Parents website, and believes that parents finds it useful, although it is acknowledged that some parents think that the onus is on teachers to provide more help in the classroom.

Sgoil an Òib was recommended for consultation by as a school where examples of good practice are evident, and so it's response was particularly significant. Parents' need for support with homework is acknowledged, and for several years an annual 'Gàidhlig anns an Dachaigh' homework club, running for four weeks, has been set up. It was noted that this year attending parents seemed keener to develop their own Gaelic, with

more input on grammar and theory, that to discuss homework. The school provides bilingual homework activities for parents, including use of BBC Alba and iPlayer games. Parents are also encouraged to access the Gaelic4Parents website to support their children, especially with their reading.

Sgoil Phaibil was also recommended. The impression the school has is that, apart from help with homework, parents do not feel a need for support, and have confidence in the school. Help with homework, particularly where children are in the early years of primary education, is only required where parents have little or no Gaelic: the school gauges their needs according to their fluency. To meet them, there are several measures: tapes, CDs and notes on phonetics are sent home to help with reading; there is an ‘open door’ policy for queries, problems, and communications in general; if, as in the past, many parents lack Gaelic, a weekly meeting is convened to advise them of forthcoming classwork and associated homework; homework diaries keep parents informed; leaflets on anything helpful or relevant – for example, ‘Basic Gaelic for Parents’, advice on Gaelic4Parents and other internet resources – are provided. There is a regular school newspaper, and a strong Gaelic ethos in the school, through visual Gaelic, projects, participation in Mòds, and presentations on the school’s bilingual website. The school has limited evidence of a wish to learn Gaelic among non-Gaelic speaking parents; the nearest classes known of with certainty are those for an Ùlpan course in Lionacleit. The guiding philosophy is evidently the meeting of needs through anticipation, recognition, and appropriate action, and maintenance of a pronounced ‘open door’ policy combined with open evenings, parents’ evenings, and parents’ frequent involvement in school projects: the schools’ strong relationship with parents was recorded in the last HMI inspection report. The only aspect which hasn’t worked quite so well is the incomplete attendance at the weekly meetings, when run, on schoolwork and homework: some parents have been unable to attend because of work commitments.

Sgoil an Ìochdair was similarly recommended. The headteacher reckoned that parents’ needs were to be able to help with homework, and to be able to enrich their children’s learning through the medium of Gaelic. To this end, the school maintains a policy of openness and continual interaction, not just with parents but with the families – the grandparents, and other relatives who also attend school events. There are classes for parents, focusing on school work and homework, during P1/P2 Sradagan sessions: the activities and childcare allow parents to take advantage of this opportunity. There is close coordination of the stages of Gaelic-medium education – Pàrant’s Pàiste, Cròileagan and primary school – the children progressing without hiatus to the next level: one of the teachers is involved with the Cròileagan and quite often a particular primary school topic – ‘the planets’ was one cited – is adapted for simultaneous use in the Cròileagan. The most successful method of providing support, it is reckoned, is openness, the provision of information, and the involvement of parents – which is particularly to the fore in the school’s numerous events – art, drama, etc. The school claims a pronounced ‘feallsanachd Ghàidhealach’, evident in the primary position of

Gaelic, and immediately apparent as the habitual speech of the staff, in notices and displays (bilingual, but Gaelic first), and in the reception services.

### Secondary school

As mentioned above, at Sgoil a' Bhac it is reckoned that the need to support parents of secondary Gaelic-medium pupils does not arise. At the Nicolson Institute, there are few requests for support. 'Chan eil sin ag ràdh nach eil coir aig taic a bhith ann agus nach dèanadh sin feum mhòr.' But it is reckoned assistance with homework is obtained by the pupils themselves: they help each other by telephone or the internet.

### Local Authority

The local authority, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, reported that it has an agreement with Comunn na Gàidhlig whereby Comhairle nan Eilean's Education and Children's Services Department make a financial contribution which allows Comunn na Gàidhlig to employ a part-time Gaelic-Medium Promotion Co-ordinator (q.v.). The Education and Children's Services Department also produces information leaflets for parents on the benefits of bilingualism and Gaelic-medium education.

In a pilot venture in Point and Back, the Community Education Service has provided homework help for parents of children in Sgoil àraich, P1 and P2. This has been very successful, and it is hoped that it will be developed. Community Education also run classes for parents, and the Council provides a discount for Gaelic-medium education parents who attend Ùlpan classes.

During the last term of the 2011-12 school year, all head teachers were invited to attend an event to discuss how individual schools could promote Gaelic-medium education and provide support to parents.

### CnaG Promotion Co-ordinator (part-funded by CnES)

The Co-ordinator works closely with staff within the Education and Children's Services Department, with Comann Nam Pàrant (Nàiseanta), and with other partners as appropriate in ensuring that all pre-school parents have a full-range of information on the operation and benefits of Gaelic-medium education; contributing to promotional events and activities; in the distribution of 'Gaelic Galore' packs to parents; setting up a Western Isles branch of Bilingualism Matters and having direct involvement in its coordination; and meeting parents who express an interest in Gaelic-medium education for their children (q.v. Comann nam Pàrant, above: the network of Parental Advisors who promote Gaelic-medium education at coffee mornings and other local events.)

The Coordinator feels that the most successful kind of support provided, on a personal level, is probably that for homework. The Gaelic4Parents online homework help is also good: more are using it every year. But the uptake of many provisions was said to follow

an observable pattern: some parents make good use of them, while others don't, although they may have sought them.

#### 8.4.2 **Highland**

##### Comann nam Pàrant

The response from Sutherland detailed Gaelic-medium primary parents' needs as: tailored homework support (translations, guide to reading and phonics) at the time of the child's entry to primary school – there being no pre-school available at the moment; induction/ family week to help parents and children with basic commands and vocabulary used in school; monthly workshops on homework; Ùlpan or TIP workshops or monthly workshops; details of continued forthcoming support; contact with Gaelic-medium parents in other areas; knowledge of what ability in Gaelic and English their children should attain at various stages (though for English the situation was described as improved), and whether or not to use English with English reading books. With regard to the transition to secondary education, a need for more information was reported: parents were apparently unaware that their children would be automatically placed in Gaelic-medium classes in the high school: 'in separate classes doing subjects in Gaelic-medium that their parents hadn't been informed about'. Overall, the response gave an impression that parents felt unsupported and isolated, with doubts about their children's attainment in Gaelic and ability to attain through Gaelic-medium education: it was reported that children in Gaelic-medium education subject classes in the secondary had been withdrawn for the latter concern.

At Nairn, parents' needs, in respect of Gaelic-medium education at all levels, were seen as: acquiring a knowledge of the language through study and subsidised classes; knowing that their children are supported, having more opportunities to use Gaelic with their children in the community; assistance with homework; having links with other Comann nam Pàrant groups; leaflets and books with basic phrases and terminology related to school subjects; 'tools to support your child within the Gaelic curriculum e.g. DVDs in Gaelic and English', and knowing about websites useful for homework. Much of this is apparently being met, though the sense of support seemed to vary according to parents' awareness and the particular stage of their children's education. The playgroup was praised, as was the primary school, with teachers being helpful and the after-school club described as a 'great success' (though with the qualification that older children, attending with younger siblings, find it 'babyish') and the Bòrd na Gàidhlig Early Years Support Worker is helpful and encouraging. Parents also make use of Gaelic4Parents, BBC Alba and Radio nan Gàidheal, attend the local 'Gàidhlig san Dachaigh' classes, and provide mutual support, but some are apparently still unaware of some of these forms of support.

A response was received from Lochcarron [ Redacted – personal data ]. In a list of what was thought helpful to non-speaker Gaelic-medium

parents, the respondent acknowledged better knowledge of Gaelic as a parent's most useful tool. The 'family weeks' – with child care – at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig were nominated as the best form of support for parents: '(T)hese are a fantastic opportunity to meet other Gaelic-medium parents from around Scotland.....and to be able to learn intensively with out everyday life interfering'. There was additional mention of local Gaelic classes, now in abeyance; children's music CDs and accompanying booklets with words; learning with children by being in situations where Gaelic is spoken 'simply' – what is learned together can be shared more easily afterwards. Certain potentially supportive measures have not, however, worked out: the availability of Gaelic books is of no use to non-speaking parents unless there is a phonetic translation and an English translation, or a CD. Similarly, with regard to homework, it was felt that parents can only make best use of online homework help if their proficiency in Gaelic has reached a certain standard, and more of the assistance may with ideas and, for example, testing of spelling, which parents may only be able to provide in English.

A committee member of Gairloch Comann nam Pàrant answered as an individual parent, as there has not been a branch meeting for a while. There is a need for more Gaelic activities outwith the school and in the local area; at present parents are obtaining support from fèisean, and BBC Alba – both website and channel, and these are cited as successful for the purpose.

A committee member of Ullapool Comann nam Pàrant responded: there is a need in Ullapool for Gaelic-medium activities outside school: there are some young people who are keen to get involved, but, with a lot of local groups vying for support, parents themselves do not have enough time to take the initiative. It was thought that there needed to be more help from Bòrd na Gàidhlig and professionals to set up Sradagan and/or after-school clubs: '(W)e often hear about jobs being created to support Gaelic in the community but never see anything happening'. There are Ùlpan classes twice a week. Parents do make use of websites such as Gaelic4Parents, and help each other, and the school assists: a parent pack was distributed to parents of children in the Sgoil Araich, which contained 'Basic Gaelic for Parents', and the primary teachers are always very helpful.

The respondent of the Inverness branch of Comann nam Pàrant perceived the needs of parents as being: help with homework: more information 'and education' for parents on Gaelic-medium education – as there are increasing numbers of parents who have no Gaelic background; Gaelic classes for parents. The support used by parents at present comprises: the Gaelic4Parents homework site and their reading books; occasional workshops at the school on literacy, numeracy, immersion, 'etc'; 'a good and progressive programme of Ùlpan classes at BSGI – they are 'well used by parents and are planned to fit well with sgoil-àraich and school times'; websites recommended by the school to use as part of homework, or for 'interest/fun'. The most successful forms of support have been workshops and classes. The school workshops have been 'very successful' though often run during the day and can thus be difficult for working parents

to attend. Comann nam Pàrant has run very popular, Saturday morning "Gaelic for the Home" sessions, with singing and nursery rhymes and homework help: these provided childcare and activities simultaneously which helped parents to attend (other sources argued that these were due to continue under the remit of the Gaelic Development Officer). There have also been 'very useful' workshops funded by Highland Council and Bòrd na Gàidhlig. With regard to the Ùlpan classes: these are working well, although it would also be useful to have classes teaching simple phrases for parents who want to acquire some basic knowledge without the committing themselves to an Ùlpan course.

The Comann nam Pàrant branch in Sleat has been all but inactive since the campaign to establish the primary school as a Gaelic one; the group's efforts at that time having dissipated much of their energy. The listed contact reckoned that many Gaelic-medium parents who don't have Gaelic do not realise that they need to support their children's Gaelic at home, and participate in a Gaelic community; they evidently believe that their children's Gaelic is better than it is. (This suggests that, in not considering their role in supporting their children's Gaelic outside pre-school or primary, the question of what support they may require to do this does not arise.) The Cròileagan is, it was reckoned, very good for parents, but personal experience as a fluent Gaelic learner with Gaelic-medium primary school children was that it is hard to maintain Gaelic as the home language, there being peer-pressure at school to speak English outside the classroom. The school, it was felt, does all it can, and the Gaelic4Parents helpline is good, but 'there needs to be something else.....some other body needs to do more'. There are certainly opportunities to learn Gaelic, and a conversation group, but they do not cater for the particular needs of parents. There was and is some informal mutual support amongst Gaelic-medium parents.

The respondent for the Portree branch of Comann nam Pàrant reckoned that only parents without Gaelic – the majority – needed support, which comprises knowledge of Gaelic-medium education and resources, extra-curricular Gaelic-medium activities, homework support and language classes. Comann nam Pàrant distributes information on all of these, helped to set up the Homework Club with support from Community Development, and is involved in the activities. Amongst the last-named is the Sradagan, which the local Comann nam Pàrant branch, funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, runs along with the Rionnagan Beaga and the Cròileagan: an arrangement which precludes separate applications for funding to different bodies, and is apparently working very well. The only classes in the Portree area at present are Ùlpan ones, for which parents and childminders are part-funded: Comann nam Pàrant advocated that childminders, particularly those looking after children aged 0–3, should be included. In this respect, the respondent intimated that the Ùlpan class in Portree, and others on Skye, are being taught by former pupils of Portree High School who, during their S6 in the 2011-12 school year, took a course in the teaching of Gaelic by the Ùlpan method. The most important form of support for parents is, it was reckoned, the provision of the Sradagan club. The primary school has a good Gaelic ethos – inside the classrooms: peer pressure

dispels it elsewhere. One point made with respect to the work of Comann nam Pàrant concerned the amount of administration and activity carried out on a voluntary basis: it would be good if, amongst the financing of local Gaelic development, there were some remuneration directed to this.

### Pre-school

The respondent for Cròileagan a' Chaolais at Bonar Bridge had found that a booklet with basic phrases, pronunciation, meanings had been useful, as had a reading course at Craighill Primary and a small booklet with basic rules for reading. However, this appeared to refer to support at the primary school level.

The respondent for Cearcall Àth Tharracail at Acharacle reported that, after years of difficulty in establishing regular community-based language lessons, through their own fundraising and financial support from Bòrd na Gàidhlig a tutor has been found who provides a course tailored to the needs of pre-school parents. There is evidently some feeling that, given the local Gaelic-medium primary provision, it should have been provided without their initiative. A wider issue, the report went on, is that there is no support for parents of Gaelic-medium children who have additional support needs, and this is felt likely to influence parents' decision about opting for Gaelic-medium education.

### Primary school

Bun-sgoil Phort Rìgh reported that the main support which parents need is with helping their children's homework, and to provide an opportunity for this a Homework Club has been set up: giving simple and straightforward information about the language. The school's philosophy of support is to listen to parents, work with the local branch of Comann nam Pàrant and respond through meetings, information and the school website, though it was felt that there has not been enough input and centrally-organised help from the local authority since the post of Gaelic Advisor fell into abeyance. The Homework Club was judged to be the most efficacious single form of support, but Gaelic classes were also recognised as important. Very few parents were known to make use of Gaelic4Parents or other websites.

At Bun-sgoil Shlèite, parents' needs were seen as: knowing what Gaelic-medium education means and how to support it, and knowing how to help with homework. The school's philosophy is linked to its policy of language acquisition: that parents should be as comfortable as possible with Gaelic-medium Education, have opportunities to learn the language, be kept informed about their children's progress, welcomed into the school and given opportunities for involvement. The proximity of the facilities of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is obviously helpful. Parents come to the Sgoil Àraich and become familiar with songs, rhymes, 'Basic Gaelic for Parents', CDs, and are advised about websites such as those of Stòrlann and Foghlam Alba. For P1, there is a meeting of parents, where they are provided with materials, and information about phonics and

reinforcement of their children's learning. Parents who are not Gaelic speakers have all made an effort to learn; extra help has been given to the parents in the case of their children switching from English-medium to Gaelic-medium; parents can take home any books they want, and there are extended opportunities to enrich pupils' and parents' vocabulary. All letters to homes are bilingual, and emails are sent to inform parents of anything new which might be helpful. In respect of the most successful methods of providing support, the policy of involving parents from the start, and teaching them sounds so that they can help their children's reading, were foremost.

Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis reported that, with about 20%–25% of pupils having a Gaelic speakers at home, support was needed by most parents. This is achieved through workshops which involve words with actions. There is a Gaelic development team at the school, teaching language use and songs; parents help with the school garden/'croft'; they are 'trying new ideas all the time'. Parents are encouraged to attend Ùlpan classes, and the family weeks at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and in Lewis are promoted. Parents are kept informed of their children's progress through their school 'profiles' which include targets for language development. Some P1 pupils who require it are given notes in English along with their Gaelic homework, to ensure clear understanding, and there is a Homework Club meeting every week, to help parents: this was cited as the method of support which has worked best, not least for the simple exercise of bringing pupils into the school. Parent's own learning of the language was accounted important, and the Ùlpan classes, although good, were acknowledged as not suitable for everyone in their style and scheduling: it was wished that there were other available ways for parents to learn, though this was not an issue under the school's control.

Mallaig Primary focuses its support on building good relationships with Gaelic-medium education parents. Formerly, it held a meeting for prospective P1 parents, but this introduction is now incorporated in a 'Curriculum for Excellence Open Day': nursery and prospective primary parents are provided with information about Gaelic-medium education, school and online resources language classes, etc. There are good links with the parent body: it is expected that these will be confirmed and reinforced by preparations for and participation in the forthcoming Mòd. The Open Day seeks to provide the initial support, but parents do not often raise questions during the school year about homework or other aspects of Gaelic-medium education. The school enters helpful information and explanations in the children's Gaelic homework diaries. In respect of a Gaelic ethos, the school asserts that, as far as possible, the use of Gaelic in signage and notices around the school is equal to that of English. With respect to Gaelic tuition for parents: there used to be classes taught by one of the teachers, but these have ceased: now there are Ùlpan classes in Mallaig.

### Secondary school

Inverness Royal Academy reported that parents do not request support: if pupils have a difficulty, they ask the teachers.

Dingwall Academy does not have a formal policy to support parents: parents can phone if they want assistance, but they hardly ever do. It is reckoned that when their children are in secondary school, parents are able to help – with translation at least, if necessary – if their knowledge of Gaelic is more advanced than that of their children. If their children's Gaelic is more advanced, they will be better able to cope with the linguistic aspect of homework, and in that respect parents cannot offer support.

Portree High School reported that if parents have needs in respect of their children's Gaelic-medium education in the secondary school, they comprise, in the main, information about it, and encouragement and confidence to choose it for their children. Problems related to their ability to help their children with the work rarely arise: in many cases the pupils have more Gaelic than the parents, and even if the parents have sufficient Gaelic, they may not be *au fait* with the subject matter. If parents require it, summaries in English are provided by teachers; and they can also use the Gaelic4Parents helpline.

### Local Authority

Highland Council intimated that all parents of children in primary or secondary Gaelic-medium education could claim a 50% discount on Ùlpan class fees. The Council is also working with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to develop a literacy course for fluent adults.

The experience of the Council's west area is that the prime need, and that most requested, is support with homework, and that this applied from pre-school to secondary, but especially when children are in primary school. Stòrlann's Gaelic4Parents has proved very successful, especially the provision of live assistance with homework by telephone or email. Other successful forms of support are Gaelic classes which are cheap or free, and focus on language used in the home and in school, and the help which a network of parents can obtain from each other. There aren't many parental support groups or forums within the Highland Council area: such groups and parent committees and organisers tend to lose personnel as parents move on with their children's progress upward and out of school education, but it was reported that Highland Council Gaelic Development staff are engaged in keeping groups going: for example, maintaining the organising of 0–3 pre-school groups. Such work, it was stated, was also being carried out in Argyll and Bute, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, and the Glasgow area.

Highland Council's Gaelic Development team also provided a report of the issues raised in the six consultation events held in 2011 to mark the Council's twenty-fifth anniversary of Gaelic-medium education provision. The team works with the Council's 0–3 age group workers; the primary and secondary schools, and the Gaelic agencies. The support of Gaelic-medium education parents starts long before the children actually go to school: '(T)here is a long process prior to that which involves supporting potential parents, some attending a 0 to 3 group, and some who don't. The support consists of providing information and explanations about Gaelic-medium education and the

benefits of bilingualism, and giving reassurance, particularly to parents who do not have Gaelic themselves and are thus taking a big step. 'There is a lot of trust involved.' Confidence is built up by answering questions about homework and other support, educational needs, and the child's competence in speaking and reading English. Once children start in primary school, Community Development Officers help to set up homework clubs; arranging and providing information about Gaelic classes for parents (seeking to establish ones with an emphasis on the language used in school and home), and Gaelic-medium activities which their child can take part in. Information days are held, books are supplied to libraries, and in some areas workshops for parents have been provided on specific topics, for example on reading, on songs and rhymes, or more generally highlighting the kinds of support available. Additional educational needs are usually identified by the middle years of primary school and this can be a concern as there is a lack of specialised Gaelic-medium support: here, other parents who have had similar experience often provide good support. Transition to secondary school also raises particular concerns and there is a need to provide information about secondary Gaelic-medium education, and the importance of continuing with Gaelic to ensure attainment of full fluency. Gaelic careers advice is also required. In general, the approach is to respond to the expressed needs of parents, area by area, very often speaking to them face to face. The forms of support which have attracted most praise have been the homework clubs, Gaelic-medium activities out of school, and family learning opportunities such as the summer week at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig.

Iomairt Ghàidhlig Loch Abair, acquired extensive experience of Gaelic development and Gaelic-medium teaching in Lochaber, and learning support for Gaelic-medium primary and pre-school education in Lochaber and elsewhere in the Highlands. Personal experience suggested that the support parents need comprises information about Gaelic-medium; encouragement to learn Gaelic; knowing what things to do with children at home; opportunities to be involved in activities where Gaelic can be used, such as fèisean. All opportunities to use Gaelic outside the school are to be encouraged. When teaching Gaelic-medium classes, it was recognised that parents who did not have sufficient Gaelic to understand it would have difficulties, and so, except in the case of particularly able youngsters, the homework given out had tended to be consolidation of what had been learned in school, which pupils could complete without parental help.

### 8.4.3 Argyll and Bute

#### Comann nam Pàrant

The response from the Dunoon branch of Comann nam Pàrant identified the need for more structured support from the education system – something universal like a handbook to cover the basics. Ùlpan classes were praised, but it was pointed out that not everyone can attend Gaelic classes, or wants to. Parents in their area used the Comann nam Pàrant network to obtain help from each other, and the Gaelic4Parents website is popular and found to be very useful: one parent who does not have access to the internet has more difficulties to surmount. The teachers were reported to be very good, though not offering help with, for example, homework, unless asked; one teacher had provided explanatory sheets on aspects such as spelling.

The representative of Comann nam Pàrant for Oban and Lorne felt that the chief difficulty for parents wishing to find out about and enrol their children in Gaelic-medium education, to involve them in Gaelic-medium activities, and to obtain information about adult classes, is a lack of coordination amongst the agencies involved: there is no single source. The staff at Rockfield Primary are very willing to help and good at supporting parents with information, explanations, the Gaelic-medium education homework diary, and bilingual material if required, but they are often asked about other Gaelic activities in the area, although their responsibility is only for education. However, it was also felt that some parents do not take enough notice of the information and opportunities which are provided.

In the absence of a Comann nam Pàrant branch on Mull, opinion was taken from a parent, found through a series of recommended contacts : it was held that parents' main needs are information, support with homework and furthering their knowledge of the language. In respect of the latter, there is a certain difficulty in providing accessible classes on Mull, because the island is so large. However, it is often the case that parents who do opt for their children to be in Gaelic-medium education are sufficiently motivated.

#### Pre-school

At Cròileagan Apainn the reported support focused on learning the language. Parents are often learners and the support a fluent Gaelic speaker provides is essential: while the children have fun learning through books, toys, songs rhymes and games, repetition helps the parents. 'This stage is more important in supporting the parent. The more comfortable the parent is with their own learning, the more likely they are to support Gaelic-medium education.' The respondent has also found the local language group, which has flexible weekly classes, to be valuable support. The respondent has found websites slow, but finds their audio facility essential.

### Primary school

At Salen Primary School, the general approach to supporting parents comprises awareness, advice and provision of the material and facilities which are available. Parents are helped with any aspect which concerns them: for example, it is recognised that parents may feel that their own understanding of Gaelic is inadequate and, to assist, the school supplies audio tapes to accompany books in the early years, and long notice is given on homework. The P1 teacher meets all new parents, provides a booklet and CD of useful phrases, and gives information and advice about, for example, use of the Gaelic4Parents website. The school contributes to the Mull and Iona Gaelic Partnership and distributes flyers about any Gaelic events or, for example, programmes on BBC Alba, and this appears to be a measure which parents certainly make use of. One online facility which was reported as not having worked so well for parents is the Stòrlann parent support: there had apparently been some difficulties with logging-in.

A comprehensive response was received from Rockfield Primary on the Oban Primary Campus. When the children in Pre-5 are undergoing transition to P1 they have a Parents Meeting where each family is given a pack containing information about the school, information specifically about Gaelic-medium education and a CD with written notes covering helpful vocabulary and commands that can be used at home in Gaelic. It is acknowledged that parents' main need is to feel confident that they can support their children with homework, especially with reading and, to this end, the school is careful to make sure that all parents are aware of the Gaelic4Parents website, and notification is given in the children's homework diaries of new books which should be listened to online. All maths homework is bilingual so that parents can discuss the mathematical concepts at home with their child. At the start of each term, each class teacher sends to the homes an information leaflet which details the main literacy, numeracy and topic foci of the term, so that parents have advance notice of the support to be given. The PT Gaelic has in the past run a homework club for P5–7 Gaelic children, in recognition of the counter-productive stress which more demanding language homework puts on families. The club was well received by parents and well attended, but it was an additional commitment for teaching staff and it is hoped now that the live help on the Gaelic4Parents website has made the club unnecessary. There is a Comann nam Pàrant branch with a designated Gaelic-Medium Officer who is charged with supporting new parents and those considering Gaelic-medium education. The school has developed strong links with the Comann nam Pàrant body over the past year and regularly has parent helpers come into the school to work with the children on art/drama/eco projects. They have had a Sradagan group in the past which was enjoyed by children and offered an opportunity for parents to mix and support one another in terms of Gaelic-medium education, but this in abeyance. The local Toy Cupboard – a toy lending library which is hugely supportive to parents of young children – now runs Gaelic sessions and there are Gaelic Bookbug sessions in the local library as well.

### Secondary school

At Tobermory High School, Gàidhlig itself is taught, but not other subjects through the medium of the language. The PT Gaelic reported that currently, other than regular contact with the home through the use of school planners, parents' nights and school reports, the school does not offer any additional support to parents. The feeder primary has very strong links with parents, but it is felt that as pupils enter secondary, parents tend to take 'a slight back-seat'; however, it is considered that increased links with the home is an objective which should be pursued, and there would be interest in the results of this investigation.

At Oban High School, the needs of parents of secondary Gaelic-medium education pupils only arise in questions at parents' evenings, and are associated with individual pupils' paths of learning. The most common general concern is a lack of Gaelic-medium delivery of subjects other than Gàidhlig itself. The local branch of Comann nam Pàrant was reckoned to be more focused on Gaelic-medium education at the primary level rather than the secondary.

#### Argyll and Bute Council

The Gaelic Development Officer intimated that support for parents of Gaelic-medium education pupils was provided by the schools as appropriate.

The Early Years Development Officer has not long been in post: the remit is for both English and Gaelic, and thus far the officer has been concerned with parents and toddler groups. In respect of the Gaelic groups, for the most part work has been in Sandbank (Dunoon) Appin and Oban. The officer reported that almost all of the parents are not Gaelic speakers: their motivation often seems to be either that their children should have an opportunity they missed (the language not having been passed on to them through their family), or an appreciation of the educational benefit of bilingualism. Although not many have, at this stage, appeared keen to learn Gaelic, they have been pleased with what they have acquired by participation in 'Bookbug' sessions which first started in Oban in June 2011. These are forty minute sessions, once a week over a block of 6–7 weeks, during parent and toddler meetings. The children and their parents learn songs and rhymes, and in the middle of the session a book is read to them. The EYDO has used the same book throughout each block: as well as reading to the children the officer reads it to the parents, who take a copy home with them, with an English translation and phonics, for consolidation with the children. This has apparently worked well: both toddlers and parents gain a thorough familiarity with and understanding of the text, and the parents are surprised by how much they have learned, without difficulty. The EDYO anticipates involvement with sgoiltean àraich in future. The officer also reported that Argyll and Bute Council are piloting the use of 'ante-natal' songs and music, and thought it an innovation which could be utilised for Gaelic.

#### 8.4.4 Other Council Areas

##### Comann nam Pàrant

The contact for Comann nam Pàrant Chille Mhearnaig told of ‘a fair percentage of parents who are actively learning Gaelic’, and also of testimony from one father at a meeting that many P1 parents would be keen to have more help with homework. There is an awareness of Gaelic4Parents, but this is apparently not readily accessible to parents who work shifts.

In Edinburgh, it was felt by Comann nam Pàrant that parents needed support in encouraging children to use Gaelic more frequently outside school; in becoming familiar with terminology used for mathematics; and in helping parents to learn enough Gaelic ‘to enable them to use other resources such as websites, and to help with homework etc.’ Suggested measures of further support were: more written resources – Gaelic fiction for children beyond the early primary years, Gaelic non-fiction, especially that supporting school topics, and Gaelic reference books; adult learning was deemed a high priority – Gaelic classes which are not expensive, have childcare provided, and which are geared to parents’ needs in particular; default use of Gaelic by teachers when speaking to parents. Support used at present was listed as: Gaelic4Parents (the sound files for Storyworlds books were mentioned); Comhairle nan Leabhraichean; Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (apparent reference to the Families Week and/or learners’ materials online); the school itself; ‘cròileagan’; Comann nam Pàrant; other parents; siblings; BBC Alba children’s programmes; online dictionaries especially ‘Am Faclair Beag’; weekly, daytime Ùlpan classes with a crèche for younger children. One respondent felt that there were too many websites: it would be better to amalgamate them ‘rather than more groups going off and building new ones, which seems to happen whenever someone gets some funding’. Out of school Gaelic-medium activities such as Fèisean and the Families Week at SMO are ‘very helpful for families’...particularly...where parents are not fluent Gaelic speakers’.

Bishopbriggs Comann nam Pàrant gave the needs of parents as: to be able to understand Gaelic; to be able to support children in Gaelic-medium education; to be offered regular available Gaelic classes that are either affordable or possibly free; knowledge around accessing information on Gaelic-medium education and resources; knowledge their children will not get any less of an education; support during the transition from primary school to secondary school – most classes in Gaelic-medium primary schools are very small and children may find the change difficult. The support used at present comprises: the Homework Club; BBC Alba; Gaelic4Parents; Gaelic classes and local Gaelic groups; other parents with children at the school; Fèisean nan Gàidheal; and Meadowburn Primary School itself – the headteacher and teachers are very supportive of the parents. The Homework Club was nominated as support which had worked very well, but ‘Council transport to and from school (are) proving to have continued difficulties’.

Comann nam Pàrant in Glasgow reckoned that parents would like better support for those with additional needs in Gaelic-medium education, and childcare for younger children of parents who are learning – Glasgow Life does not provide it for children under three, except at the Saturday Club and the week-long Family Learning Summer Club. The learning facilities themselves were much appreciated: in addition to the above, there are classes every day of the week, all run by parents but funded by Glasgow Life (which delivers, *inter alia*, community-based services) with the Family Learning Summer Club adjudged the most successful venture in parental support: a great start, or further help, for learners and the opportunity to meet others. Many parents use Gaelic4Parents and online dictionaries and apps.

The response from the Comann nam Pàrant in Perth was detailed, but partly concerned the need for Gaelic development in general in the Perth area, rather than support for parents of Gaelic-medium education parents. A particular practical need is school transport for Gaelic-medium education pupils – the lack, said one member, caused a struggle to keep the child in the Gaelic-medium stream. There is a need for Early Years provision; a desire for more community-based Gaelic activities, for both children and families, especially during school holidays; opportunity to learn Gaelic; and classroom support for special education needs (‘a classroom assistant specific to Gaelic’). Support used at present comprises the online homework help (‘very effective and extremely useful’); other parents and friends elsewhere; the class teacher and the headteacher. Comann nam Pàrant, the Perth and Kinross Council Gaelic Development Officer, CnaG promotion leaflets and the Comann nam Pàrant Parental Advisor were also mentioned. It was suggested that a homework club, and a Mòd club with other children in the Perth area ‘would be great’.

Pre-school (Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu is shown separately, below)

The respondent for Pàrant ’s Pàiste Chille Mhearnaig in Kilmarnock had found that parents are keen to learn Gaelic phrases which are useful in the home, and ‘Basic Gaelic for Parents’ is popular for this purpose. The group sessions are structured to include parental learning. There are two mothers who are active within the Parental Advisory Scheme who are very willing to provide information to all parents who are considering Gaelic-medium education. The respondent reckoned that the support available is probably adequate for the pre-school stage.

The contact for the Clann Trang Playgroup at East Kilbride reported that parents are given information sheets which included some words and phrases which their children would be using, with phonics and translations. At the Gaelic nursery parents and children used story sacks with books, tapes or CDs, and visual aids and games to reinforce the use of the language.

Primary school (Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu is shown separately, below)

Tollcross Primary in Edinburgh identified helping parents with reading as their top priority in support: parents are concerned about this, and they are exploring ways of meeting the need. Parents are told about support available from the Gaelic4Parents site, but Tollcross can provide it for reading. It is evident that parents get a great deal of communal support from each other and the school. There is no lack of parental involvement, often with children in attendance and using Gaelic; the PT Gaelic has done very well in building links, and organises coffee mornings and other events; the Comann nam Pàrant branch is very good and provides a lot of parental support – its meetings were cited as a successful method of support; many parents attend Ùlpan classes in the school and make use of the resource centre; the Edinburgh Mòd and Fèis are well attended.

At Condorrat Primary, the general philosophy is to work with the parents, to communicate with them and with other schools for whatever may be useful. It is recognised that almost all parents need support: only two of a hundred and seventy Gaelic-medium pupils have a Gaelic speaker at home. Different measures of support are provided for parents of pupils in the sgoil àraich, in P1 and in P2–4. Sgoil àraich parents receive ‘family fun bags’ containing stories, a CD, a teddy, a parent phone book etc. There are worksheets and a ‘parent wall’ of information in the sgoil araich. In the primary school, CDs to accompany books, sound files of sounds and words, and a phrasebook are provided. CDs have been found to be very helpful, but the homework help facility at the Gaelic4Parents website less so: the school provides help with homework at three lunchtimes per week and a ‘masterclass’ for all pupils on Fridays. There are after-school clubs, but not so well attended as some pupils have to travel home. There has been a Gaelic class for parents, but that stopped after six or seven weeks: many parents live at a distance from the school and there are other Gaelic classes in the area. The school’s Parent Council is very good; a Comann nam Pàrant branch for the school had been considered but it was thought the one body would be better; a Comann nam Pàrant branch for North Lanarkshire is mooted.

(Supplementary information: the contact for Clann Trang in East Kilbride, has children in Mount Cameron Primary: it was reported that one of the primary teachers has taught an introductory Gaelic class; the Gaelic4Parents website had been used to help read school books to the children, and occasionally the Am Faclair Beag site but, unlike the next generation, found this difficult to use. Sometimes, as no English translation is provided, the homework has been difficult to follow. Although the respondent has a little knowledge of the language and some vocabulary, it was reckoned it would have been useful some more help at the start in the form of a booklet, DVD, CD or handout giving an insight into the language and ‘some good basic things to get started’.)

The response from Goodlyburn Primary in Perth saw parents’ needs as: support with homework especially if, as in many cases the parents are not Gaelic speakers; a clear understanding of what is involved in Gaelic-medium education – the differences and

similarities between Gaelic-medium education and mainstream; confidence that a child with Additional Support Needs will be supported in the best possible way; assurance that attainment levels will be equal to those of mainstream peers ('as we know, very often exceeding that of mainstream peers'). The school feels it has a good relationship with parents; it advises them about online resources such as Gaelic4Parents, and other Gaelic agencies; it holds awareness-raising events where questions and concerns can be addressed, and has worked with parents on Gaelic fundraising events. It is reckoned that parents draw support from each other informally, and also have the local Comann nam Pàrant branch, the Ùlpan class, the Perth College 'basic speaking skills' class, the conversation group, the Gaelic choir, An Comunn Gàidhealach. It is felt that pre-school provision (currently lacking) is vital, to introduce new parents to Gaelic-medium education; the prospect of bilingualism is evidently attractive and has had an influence; and parents and pupils can see the positive opportunities offered – for Goodlyburn these have included involvement in the local Mòd, filming in Skye for a TV programme, working with Gaelic artists, participation in Gaelic competitions and links with other schools.

#### 8.4.7 Secondary school (Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu is shown separately, below)

Greenfaulds High School reported that it was very clear there that there is not so much parental engagement with Gaelic-medium education in the secondary school as there was in the primary; little support is sought except, perhaps, for preparing their children for the Mòd. It is reckoned that parents' focus switches from the language to general progress in subjects. There is a noticeable decline in Gaelic-medium pupils' use of Gaelic over the first two years of secondary, due to the peer-pressure of being in a predominantly English-speaking school, and though the parents are informed if a pupils starts to use English in the classroom, lasting support from them is lacking after the early secondary years. There was, at one time, a policy of providing a homework scheme in English for parents, but few seemed to notice it or commend it as useful.

Bishopbriggs Academy responded briefly that they had 'no suggestions'.

Hazelhead Academy in Aberdeen reported that, apart from parents' evenings, they do not have a support service for parents; however, parents know that they can telephone or visit if they have any questions.

#### Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu – Ro-sgoil/Bunsgoil/Àrdscoil

At Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu there is consideration of the needs of parents throughout the educational provision. At the pre-school stage, the requirements of parents/carers are seen as information, involvement, having a positive relationship with the school and, for those without Gaelic, support for learning. There is an Open Evening during the first term, when parents/carers can find out how to support their child at home. They also receive a booklet with common Gaelic words and phrases they can use at home, and "Learning at Home" sheets are also made available to go alongside each 'short term plan' – which are themes within a 'long term plan'. Children can borrow "Song Sacks"

to enhance their language acquisition at home. There is a policy of continuous information and parental involvement: there is a Parent Group who meet the Depute Head Teacher or Nursery Teacher each term, when staff highlight the development priorities for the session and parents are encouraged to offer their support in helping to achieve these as well as informing staff of the needs of the parents/carers with respect to supporting their children outside the nursery. At the primary stage parental needs are further recognised in the provision of homework booklets, and a ‘homework helpline’ was in operation before the Gaelic4Parents online service began (it is not known how much use parents make use of this current facility). There is an after-school Gaelic club on the premises, which facilitates parents’ work and domestic arrangements. For children using this service, there is also day care during school holidays at a ‘Holiday Club’ in East Renfrewshire. For secondary pupils, there is an after-school homework club, a homework development day, and direct subject help.

As mentioned under the section on the Comann nam Pàrant branch in Glasgow, there is a Saturday Club for children from two years old, with Gaelic classes for parents, and the week-long, much praised summer club for families, which has activities for children and classes for parents.

Many, but not all, of the parents are very involved in the school and the various activities, the clubs, and the Parent Council. They meet both formally and informally. They raise issues with the school: for example, the provision of more support to pupils with additional needs, and the use of phonics (a workshop on this for parents has been held in September 2012).

The most successful measures of support for parents have been the school’s homework helpline, before the Gaelic4Parents service began, and the Gaelic classes, which have been very successful. Nothing had been noted as unsuccessful, but the school is always aware that alongside the parents keen involvement, they have high expectations: for example, some slight parental discontentment has sometimes been evident with regard to the size of the classes: some parents expected them to be smaller.

### Local Authorities

Perth and Kinross Council provided a detailed report. The Council has two small Gaelic-medium education primary departments. More support for parents appears to be planned. The perception of parents’ needs is that they want to help their children with their homework and are therefore keen to learn the basics of the language: questions about this are asked regularly during enquiries about Gaelic-medium education. Gaelic4Parents is ‘invaluable’ as a resource ‘especially the online assistant in the evenings’. It is acknowledged that there probably are other needs which are dealt with by teachers, and parents of Gaelic-medium education children communicate with each other on issues. The Council offers financial support ‘where possible’ to parents who want to learn, but although there is evident enthusiasm on their part, they have limited

day-to-day opportunities to do so. The Council also encourages them to participate in the Family Learning week at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. There are always requests for the provision of transport to enable access to Gaelic-medium education: at the moment Perth and Kinross Council is the only local authority not providing it. Rather than a general model or a philosophy of support, the Council tries ‘to do what works and where we see good practice we will seek to repeat it’. Thus there are plans for ‘Family Learning Events’ – a local version of the Sabhal Mòr Week – in the form of a Gaelic youth club with a crèche and a learning facility for parents – but the numbers currently in Gaelic-medium education are insufficient for a regular provision. Parents would also like a homework club, from the P2 level onwards. Notice has been taken of ‘a great model of communication’ between Whitehills Primary in Forfar and Gaelic-medium parents: ‘the parents, teacher, HT and officers in the council sit together and debate issues relating to the delivery of Gaelic-medium education. We would look to do something similar here in the future’. The most successful method of communicating support needs, it is reckoned, is a strong, focused branch of Comann nam Pàrant: there is one established in Perth, and an incipient group at Breadalbane. However, it was felt that there had been insufficient support at a national level for the parents in the Perth and Kinross Council area.

Glasgow City Council reckoned that parents’ greatest need was fluency in Gaelic: more than eighty percent of them not being speakers. It is also evident that they feel a need to be assured that their children will have the same range of subjects in the secondary school at Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu as they would be offered at an English-medium secondary. Cited with respect to the forms of support available were the Gaelic classes run by Glasgow Life; the Sradagan; the stream of information about Gaelic events and Gaelic-medium activities which is provided by newsletters, notices, and websites; the Gaelic4Parents homework helpline; and the Parent Council at Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu and the parent groups at the Lyoncross and Rowena nurseries, and the Seudan Beaga and Partick parent and toddler groups. In respect of a philosophy governing the support, it was reckoned that in Glasgow it could best be described as the part of the Council’s Gaelic Plan which encompassed partnership with parents, continual consultation with them, and their involvement in developments. The most successful form of support was thought to be parents’ meetings, which are well-attended, especially if held at weekends. Digital communication, recently introduced, is also working well, and further development is foreseen.

## 8.5 Care Commission and HMIe Reports

The HMIe reports from 2006 onwards on all pre-school units, primary schools and secondary schools with Gaelic-medium education were scrutinised for references to support for parents. Many inspections mentioned good, positive relationships with the parent body, with the latter being well-informed of children's progress and involved in the life of the school, but there were fewer references to Gaelic-medium parents in particular, and fewer still of schools or pre-school units providing particular support to the Gaelic-medium parents to play their part, at home, in their children's education.

However, consideration of the support available for Gaelic-medium parents may not have been part of the inspections – it was certainly not a matter for routine comment. Such as there were, were brief, and mostly positive. Most were in reports on pre-school units: thus Cròileagan Dhùn Sgealair: 'Calum, the Gaelic-speaking teddy bear, goes home to parents at weekends to promote spoken Gaelic'; Cròileagan Inbhir Narainn: '.....[Staff] supported children and parents very well, particularly in their efforts to learn and speak Gaelic'; Cròileagan Inbhir Pheofharain: 'a few parents commented positively on the support from staff on developing further their knowledge of the Gaelic language'; Cròileagan Inbhir Theorsa: 'Staff organised information meetings and resources on the Gaelic language for parents'; 'Cròileagan Nursery', Edinburgh: 'Children could choose books to share with parents at home'. There were also comments in the reports on three primary schools: Goodlyburn Primary, Perth: 'Thug luchd-teagaisg anns a' chlas Ghàidhlig comhairle mhath do phàrantan mun dòigh air taic a thoirt do ionnsachadh na cloinne san dachaigh. Chuir pàrantan meas air a' phrìomhachas a thug àrd-luchd-stiùiridh do na h-iomagainean aca'; Tongue Primary: 'The school had provided workshops for parents in reading, writing and mathematics in both English and Gaelic. The Gaelic-medium teacher ran a weekly club to help parents to support their children with their homework'.

Amongst 23 reports since 2006 on secondary schools which have Gaelic-medium education, 17 had no specific reference to home or parents in the context of Gaelic-medium education, and the remainder had no reference to Gaelic-medium education at all. One comment on Lionacleit School – that around a third of parents wanted more information about how they could help their children with homework – may have included parents who were referring to Gaelic-medium homework.

## 8.6 **Gaelic4Parents – Homework Help**

One of the teachers who provide help on the Gaelic4Parents Homework Helpline was interviewed. Almost all of the enquiries, it was said, concern primary Gaelic-medium education: this suits the teachers' qualifications. Occasionally assistance is requested for secondary Gaelic-medium education, and in those circumstances they give as much help as they can. The service they provide is, it was reckoned, much needed: parents are often agitated by their inability to comprehend, and want explanations of vocabulary. In written responses (it is a chatline), this is provided, and brief explanations of the relevant grammar to facilitate further understanding which could be useful in solving other problems. It was believed that the G4P audio files are also a great help. Most of the helpline calls come from Glasgow, Inverness and Edinburgh: not many from Lewis. The service would probably be much busier, but for the homework clubs which many schools have set up.

## 9.0 What parents in Scotland need, and what support there is: overview

9.1 Amongst these accounts, in a few cases Comann nam Pàrant comments were not so positive about the support provided as those given by the schools and local authorities concerned. It has to be acknowledged, however, that the former are the observations of one or a few interested individuals who would wish circumstances to be better, against the views of those working with limited resources and manpower to provide what is required: a ‘half-empty’/ half-full’ division of opinion sometimes emerges. It would also appear that a fair proportion of parents are satisfied, sometimes very satisfied, with the support provided, while others do not seek it.

9.2 A review of the information and opinion shows that, in the main, support is sought by and provided to parents of children in pre-school and primary: very little is requested when children are in secondary school. Apart from particular needs – such as the provision of transport in Perth and Bishopbriggs – Gaelic-medium education parents seek support in the same forms, but the pattern of provision is far from uniform. The needs reflect the lack of Gaelic abilities amongst most Gaelic-medium education parents..

- Help with homework There is provision in various forms: introductory and explanatory meetings, school information, homework clubs, homework diaries, workshops, after-school help sessions, bilingual presentation, the Gaelic4Parents chatline, and ongoing advice from teachers. In one form or more, help with homework is universal, and there was no expression of especial anxiety, but homework clubs are particularly appreciated.
- Opportunities to learn Gaelic The frequently expressed preferences were that this provision should be cheap or free, that it should deal with a register of language and topics appropriate for use with children, and that it should be at a time convenient for parents to attend. Ùlpan classes were appreciated, but for some felt a bit advanced and requiring commitment. Summer ‘family weeks’ at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and in Lewis and Glasgow were much praised.
- Gaelic-medium activities There was a strong desire for more of these almost everywhere: parents being conscious, that their children’s daily use of Gaelic diminishes when out of school, as well as partially fulfilling their constant need for interest and action. Here again, the family events, which provide parent classes and children’s supervised Gaelic-medium activities simultaneously, were popular. (Schools do, of course, provide or host some lunchtime or after-school Gaelic-medium activities [Maxwell, 2011], but in this case parents are thinking of activities outside school.)
- Information Necessary at every stage of Gaelic-medium education and for every event, activity or opportunity, this was mentioned quite frequently, but in only a

few instances was a lack specified; the general citation may have been simply a recognition of its value. There were a few suggestions that information available had not been acknowledged.

## 10.0 Examples of best practice in support for parents of children learning through a minority language, from preschool to high school

N.B.: Basque and Catalan are included, but as the combined summary of them (6.3.1) pointed out, the speech communities and education systems have a demographic, political and financial advantage which renders them unlikely comparators.

### 10.1 Parental involvement, support groups/forums, home-school links

Basque: comprehensive involvement of parents in the life of the school and expectation of reciprocal commitment by parents; parents decide on educational programmes; representatives have a role in deciding on extra-curricular activities; parent associations organize leisure/learning activities;

Catalan: comprehensive involvement of parents in the life of the school and expectation of reciprocal commitment by parents; in each school, parents can serve on the Association of Parents of Pupils which organises and provides information and guidance, including matters such as out-of-hours childcare and extracurricular activities; or on the school council, or through being a class representative;

Welsh: in the pre-school stage, the dedicated efforts to overcome any doubts and to draw families into the Welsh-medium education stream and community apparently create networks of parents who give each other mutual support; thereafter there is Parents for Welsh-Medium Education take up issues concerning parents;

French in Ontario: in circumstances less fraught than those of nurturing a minority language, advice about particular strategies to advance both the learning of French and bilingual literacy.

### 10.2 Language learning

Basque & Catalan: ample provision for language learning, and an expectation that it will be pursued;

Welsh: a graded provision of language classes, through which learners can progress: 'Welsh from the Cradle', 'Welsh for the Family', and a five stage course – 'Welsh for Adults', with dedicated learning centres;

Irish: Within the Irish Republic, there is no shortage of opportunities to learn Irish.

### 10.3 **Activities using the language**

Basque: in both cases there are many, associated with the parental involvement the drive to ensure intergenerational transmission.

Welsh: at the pre-school stage, there is a particular effort to provide baby and toddler activities, to engage families in the Welsh-medium education stream and community;

### 10.4 **Homework**

Catalan the Reception classrooms for fast-track teaching of Catalan to children of incoming families who do not speak the language will help them achieve a fluency which will relieve their parents of the difficulties of helping with homework at that stage.

French in Ontario: the online ‘Homework Toolbox’ developed by Canadian Parents for French.

### 10.5 **Information and Promotion**

Basque and Catalan: there is, apparently, a comprehensive provision of information – this is linked to the desire to involve the parents fully in the life of the school;

Welsh: at the ante-natal and post-natal stage, through midwives and health visitors, and throughout the pre-school years, through Twf and Mudiad Meithrin field officers, and Mudiad Meithrin Development Officers, as part of the drive to engage families in the Welsh-medium education stream and community.

### 10.6 **Language ethos**

Basque and Catalan: the use of the language is obligatory in school (although, apparently, in Basque-medium education, parents have a role in deciding in which language an extra-curricular activity will be taught);

Welsh: the use of the language is promoted constantly in pre-school groups, and obligatory in Welsh-medium schools (there are, however, schools where there are both Welsh-medium and English-medium streams, and there the degree of Welsh language ethos will undoubtedly be weaker).

## 11.0 Examples of best practice of support for parents in respect of Gaelic medium education

The following is presented with the caveat that the evidence could not, within the scope of the survey, be examined in depth. In addition, it would appear that there is a confirmed general awareness of parents' needs, and how they are addressed is necessarily limited by current local circumstances and resources. The examples are not exhaustive.

11.1 Some measures which suggest good practice – within the limits of the survey – are:

**For homework** – as well as the Gaelic4Parents Homework Chatline:

- Homework Clubs: all appear to be helpful and much appreciated, whether for pupils, or for parents – but difficult to arrange at a time suitable for parents who have work commitments;
- The four-week annual 'Gàidhlig san Dachaigh' course at Sgoil an Òib;
- Gauging of parents' needs with respect to homework, and the weekly homework meeting at Sgoil Phaibil;
- Classes on homework and schoolwork during P1 & 2 Sradagan at Sgoil an Ìochdair;
- Workshops on literacy, numeracy and immersion learning at Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis;
- Comann nam Pàrant Inbhir Nis's Saturday morning 'Gaelic for the Home' – children's activities plus homework help;
- The weekly session on homework at Sgoil a' Bhac, and Point, run by CnES's Community Education service, for parents of pupils in the SA, P1 & P2;
- At Tongue Primary, workshops for parents in reading, writing and mathematics in both English and Gaelic, and a weekly club to help Gaelic-medium parents to support their children with their homework.

11.2 **Opportunities to learn Gaelic**: apart from advice, information about online learning and provision of take-home resources such as 'Basic Gaelic for Parents', and CDs:

- Ùlpan classes have a good reputation, although they do not teach the baby/child language use which would fulfil many parents' initial needs;
- Portree CnP initiatives – Ùlpan classes in Skye taught by Portree High pupils who undertook the training in S6; also discounted Ùlpan fees obtained for Portree childminders;

- Cròileagan Lacasdail provides parents with simple words and phrases they can use with their children;
- The ‘Bookbug’ sessions organised by the Argyll and Bute Early Years Development Officer has, the officer says, been successful with parents who had no knowledge of Gaelic;
- The summer ‘Family Week’ run by Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu, and others at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and in Lewis;
- ‘Word and action’ workshops at Bun-Sgoil Ghàidhlig Inbhir Nis;
- A ‘reading course’ at Craighill Primary – reported as useful.

11.3 **Gaelic-medium Activities** – apart from Fèisean, Mòds, Sradagan and ‘family days’ – the summer ‘Family Weeks’ at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, and in Glasgow.

11.4 **Promotion and information** – these tasks, undertaken by the holders of posts such as following (at present too few in number) would appear to be particularly important in maintaining the Gaelic-medium stream:

- The CnaG post of Gaelic-medium Promotion Coordinator in the Western Isles, (part-funded by CnES)
- The Comann nam Pàrant Parental Advisors scheme.
- Gaelic Community Development Officers in Highland Council;
- The Early Years Development Officer in Argyll and Bute.

11.5 **Gaelic Ethos** – without a more detailed examination, this is hard to judge, but taking as a very rough guide the degree of emphasis placed on it in the accounts gathered, it would appear to be especially noticeable at Sgoil Phaibil, Sgoil an Ìochdair, and Sgoil Ghàidhlig Ghlaschu. The elements of a ‘Gaelic ethos’ are taken to include promotion and encouragement of use and learning of the language, extra-curricular Gaelic-medium activities, participation in Mòds and Fèisean as well as its spoken and written prominence around the school. (This does not always extend to websites.)

11.6 **Schools' encouragement of Gaelic-speaking parents to speak Gaelic:**

(No particular observation of 'good practice'. This does not seem to have been much considered: encouraging non-speaking parents – the vast majority – to learn some Gaelic and be supportive is seen as the principal task. It would appear that advice on the use of language in the home may be given verbally or by the Comann nam Pàrant leaflet in the course of introductions to Gaelic-medium education, and the Gaelic4Parents website – which is universally recommended – provides answers to questions on this topic.)

11.7 **Support of parents of children in Gaelic-medium education by school development groups, working parties and committees and the extended school community, including Gaelic groups:**

- Local support is provided by branches of Comann nam Pàrant: the best examples would appear to be the branches in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Portree.

## 12.0 Examples of best practice regarding parental support which could be adopted for the promotion and development of Gaelic-medium education

### 12.1 Language learning

- The Welsh language courses ‘Welsh from the Cradle’ and ‘Welsh for the Family’ could be examined to see if something of similar design might be appropriate for introduction in the Gaelic context. It was a common observation that Ùlpan courses do not teach the register or vocabulary of Gaelic which is suitable for use with babies or young children.

*Implications: course design/adaptation; employment and a new department / organisation if course(s) were to be widely adopted.*

- The strategies for educational development in the home advocated to parents by Canadian Parents for French, to stimulate both the learning of French and bilingual literacy. Would this have any degree of application to advice given to parents of children in Gaelic-medium education?

*Implication: review by educationalist specialising in language learning; if apparently of merit, further consideration by Gaelic-medium education specialists.*

- Portree Comann nam Pàrant initiatives: Ùlpan classes in Skye taught by Portree High pupils who undertook the training in S6; also discounted Ùlpan fees obtained for Portree childminders.

*Implications: Ùlpan training as an option for S6 pupils; acceptance by local authorities of the principle of discounts for Gaelic childminders on Ùlpan courses. NB: if courses especially suitable for speaking to babies and toddlers were developed, as in the Welsh models above, these would be more suitable for childminders.*

- All the summer Family Weeks were praised enthusiastically. Were it to be apparent that any further provision would receive applications, it would undoubtedly be a worthwhile expansion.

*Implications: assuming present costs of the weeks are not covered by the fees paid, supplementary funding.*

## 12.2 **Homework**

- Any additional means of the support listed in 11.1 above, as suits particular circumstances.

*Implications: time of teachers/community education officers/volunteers, some expenses.*

- The ‘Homework Toolbox’, designed and made available by Canadian Parents for French: possibly useful for older pupils.

*Implication: review by Gaelic-medium education specialists; if passed, website design and Gaelic-medium education input.*

## 12.3 **Information and promotion**

- The Twf and Mudiad Meithrin Field Officers and the Mudiad Meithrin Development Officers who give intense support to pre-school groups, from a very early age, in Wales. It is apparent that this sort of work is already developing in Scotland, and it would be hoped that it could be expanded along the Welsh model.

*Implications: employment, expenses and resources commensurate with the number of officers and the range of responsibility.*

- (From an observed lack of use of a source of information with respect to encouragement of Gaelic-speaking parents to speak Gaelic – circulated advice that schools should add links to information about Gaelic-medium education and help available to school websites.)

## 12.4 **Gaelic-medium activities**

- The summer ‘Family Weeks’ as for Language learning, above.

*Implications: assuming present costs of the weeks are not covered by the fees paid, supplementary funding.*

### **13.0 Supplementary: significant support needs observed by a minority of respondents**

Two points were raised by a few respondents, but are considered important enough to record within the results of this survey

The first is provision for children with additional support needs. This is acknowledged to be deficient, due to lack of staff, and is likely to become more acute, the greater the intake to Gaelic-medium education.

The second concerns the uneven nature of the provision of support such as tutors for parents' Gaelic classes, and personnel to set up and run pre-school groups, in areas where there is a primary school with Gaelic-medium education. It was hoped that a uniform, national provision would emerge, recalling the same element of inconsistency and uncertainty reported by HMIe (2011).

John Galloway 01/11/12

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