

No suitable sites found for Gaelic secondary school

Alternative sites for a Gaelic secondary school in the capital have been ruled out by the council, as the project risks further delays.

Little headway has been made on plans for the city's first secondary for Gaelic speaking pupils since councillors agreed to halt a consultation earlier this year.

And with no budget or location for the school agreed, council officers have warned more push backs could have a knock-on effect on the growth of primary level Gaelic Medium Education (GME) in the capital.

Proposals drawn up by The City of Edinburgh Council for the new school to be built on either a shared campus with the new Liberton High or as a standalone development on the former Castlebrae Community High School site were met with backlash from parents.

At a meeting held in January, Gaelic parents association Comann nam Pàrant told the education committee the overwhelming majority of its members had 'little or no confidence' that the plans before them would 'meet the needs' of children.



Bun-Sgoil Taobh na Pairce

Parent council for Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pàirce, Edinburgh's only Gaelic language primary on Bonnington Road, said the facility "needs to be central", amid concerns about the availability of Gaelic education across Edinburgh and the Lothians being 'restricted' if the school was built outside the city centre.

Councillors subsequently voted to delay a statutory consultation on the Liberton High proposal to allow further engagement to take place.

In March they tasked officials to re-investigate sites around the city centre and look at how concerns about transport could be addressed.

The new education committee formed after May's election will discuss the proposals for the first time next Tuesday.

A report produced for the meeting confirms that five sites mooted for a standalone central building have been deemed either unavailable or unsuitable.

The Lothian Buses depot next to Drummond Community High School

was one of the sites looked at, but it was noted this is 'operational with no current plans to relocate', and the same was the case for Fettes police HQ, the former Royal Victoria Hospital site and the Princess Alexandra Eye Pavilion on Chalmers Street.

In addition, the report said a former council fleet depot at Russell Road is 'not a suitable site for education' as it is 'between road and railway' and there are potential contamination issues.

Officials considered most of the sites too small for a school – but added that all are within a short walking distance to another secondary which would ensure delivery of a full curriculum.

The council has maintained that the option with the “strongest rationale” is a dedicated GME secondary school on a shared site at the new Liberton Community Campus, due to open in 2024.

If those plans get the go-ahead, the council said it would provide a direct bus service between Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pairce to Liberton High for pupils.

But officials have warned that further delays could impact the growth of primary-level Gaelic education.

They said that capping the number of pupils entering primary GME in Edinburgh “need to be considered”, whilst a catchment review may also be necessary for Bun-sgoil Taobh na Pairce and James Gillespies' High School, which has the city's only existing secondary age Gaelic unit.

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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