

7th Nov. 2006

NATIONAL PLAN FOR GAELIC

Seven years ago on my retirement as local GP I was persuaded to start a Primary School Gaelic Choir in Tarbert, although I am only a learner of Gaelic and have no musical training. I accept any pupils from P3 - P7 and take them once a week outside school hours at lunchtime or after school, so they have to give up their playtime. Although the choir changes every year with pupils going to senior school they have sung at Provincial Mods, concerts, ceilidhs, weddings, etc every year and at most National Mods. I have also been teaching solos and duets and we have had many successes, in spite of the lack of help from the official Gaelic organisations.

I write phonetics for the Gaelic pronunciation, but none can speak Gaelic. I get translations of the songs from friends in Glasgow or Oban who also check my pronunciation. Initially there was briefly some help from a peripatetic Gaelic teacher and then a local volunteer helped for a couple of years, but for the past 4 years there has been no Gaelic help except that pupils in P2&3 now get some tuition in rudimentary conversational Gaelic.

These children and their supporters (family, friends and other local people) would surely be fertile ground for learning Gaelic. 3 years ago I took two Primary School choirs from Tarbert to the Islay Mod including 42 members and 54 supporters.

What is needed here is a part-time or full-time Gaelic teacher for Tarbert Academy (who might also help the adult Tarbert Gaelic Choir which also has no Gaelic speakers). There must be other areas in rural Scotland which are similar to Tarbert with hardly any Gaelic speakers but the potential for an interest in learning. I feel there should be more incentive for people to make a career in teaching Gaelic, not only in Gaelic-medium schools, as well as more incentive to attract them to rural areas.

Neil Macdonald.