

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Perth and Kinross Council to permanently discontinue education provision at Forteviot Primary School, with effect from 28 June 2019, or as soon as possible thereafter; and that the pupils of Forteviot Primary School catchment area permanently receive their education at Forgandenny Primary School, from 1 July 2019 or as soon as possible thereafter; and that the delineated catchment area of Forgandenny Primary School be permanently extended to subsume the whole delineated catchment area of Forteviot Primary School from 1 July 2019.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HM Inspectors) in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Perth and Kinross Council's proposal to permanently discontinue education provision at Forteviot Primary School, with effect from 28 June 2019, or as soon as possible thereafter; that the pupils of Forteviot Primary School catchment area permanently receive their education at Forgandenny Primary School, from 1 July 2019 or as soon as possible thereafter and that the delineated catchment area of Forgandenny Primary School be permanently extended to subsume the whole delineated catchment area of Forteviot Primary School from 1 July 2019. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include a copy of this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all legislative obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children of the schools affected; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and

- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

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

- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and
- visits to the sites of both Forteviot and Forgandenny Primary Schools, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of an accessible rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Forteviot Primary School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements of the proposed closure.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Perth and Kinross Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The consultation period began on 19 March 2018 continuing until 17 May 2018. A public meeting was held in Forgandenny Primary School on 26 April 2018. There were five members of the public in attendance, three parents and two members of the community. Letters were issued to the list of statutory consultees with a link to the proposal paper and details of where and how to obtain a paper copy. The proposal paper was also published on the council website. A specific email address was set up for representations and enquiries. This was in addition to the usual methods of submitting representations. An online response form was set up on the consultation webpage. Public notice adverts were placed in the local press on 16 March 2018. There were two online responses to the consultation and both were in favour of the proposal. No written representations were received.

2.3 Those who attended the public meeting sought further clarification about different aspects of the proposal, including in the main: school roll predictions; P1 intake; allocation of places; travel arrangements; future plans for Forgandenny and Forteviot Primary School buildings; and the Local Development Plan.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 The council has presented a comprehensive account of the educational benefits of closing Forteviot Primary School. Since the mothballing of the school in October 2016, due to a falling and unsustainable school roll, children from the Forteviot catchment area and formerly on the school roll at Forteviot Primary School have been educated at Forgandenny Primary School. This has enabled Forteviot

children to access learning with groups of learners at all stages within a primary school. It has supported a greater number of learning opportunities across and between classes. It has provided Forteviot children with the opportunity to benefit from peer support from a wider group of peers and to develop their social and interpersonal skills in a broader range of appropriate contexts. Transition to secondary school has been strengthened, supported by a wider group of peers and friendship groupings. There has been no noticeable detrimental impact on children's education following their transfer to Forgandenny Primary School. As pupils of Forgandenny Primary School, children have benefited from established school partnerships such as those with Strathallan School. These provide access to digital learning and sports facilities, enhancing the curricular experience and supporting children's achievement and health and wellbeing. Children have also been able to benefit from Forgandenny Primary School's well-established involvement in both outdoor learning activities and sustainable education initiatives. Future roll predictions indicate that there is unlikely to be an increase in the pupil population within the Forteviot catchment over the next four years. Many parents had already exercised their right to placing requests for other schools prior to the mothballing, due to concerns about the falling roll and a reduction in opportunities for children to socialise with peers. In addition, the Forgandenny Primary School building has been rated more positively than the Forteviot building in relation to both suitability and condition and a closure decision would mean financial savings could be secured in line with the council's drive for best value. The proposal further secures a long term sustainable school roll and future for the Forgandenny school community and the proposed enlarged catchment area. Overall, HM Inspectors consider that there are many clear and well-founded educational benefits to the proposal.

3.2 Children who met with HM Inspectors were positive about the proposal overall. Those travelling the 2.7 miles, or six minutes, on average, from the Forteviot catchment were anxious to know if transport would continue to be provided for them once their school was closed. They expressed a desire for consistency in the council's approach, in that should Forteviot Primary School be closed then other schools with similarly small rolls should also be considered in the same way.

3.3 Staff who met with HM Inspectors believe that there has been no negative impact for Forteviot children resulting from the move to Forgandenny Primary School. They identify a number of advantages, including a more positive learning experience overall. They had some concerns, that with land in the catchment area now zoned for housing, the Forgandenny building and grounds would not have sufficient capacity in the future to cope with the increased demand from catchment families. They also recognised the potential impact on families, given that with an increased school roll, any future placing requests were less likely to be successful and therefore some siblings might not be able to be educated alongside their brother or sister.

3.4 Parents who met with HM Inspectors expressed similar views to staff. While no concerns had been raised by their children, as parents, they did have a concern over what might happen to the existing school building at Forteviot and were keen that the rich potential of the setting was capitalised upon for the benefit of the community. Some parents highlighted that the site at Forgandenny was limited in size, with restricted space both indoors and out, compared with the Forteviot site,

despite Forteviot only having two classrooms and that the space currently available might be further compromised in the future, if temporary accommodation or an extension was required to accommodate an increased number of pupils.

3.5 As the proposal will lead to the closure of an accessible rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. Prior to formulating the proposal, the council had given appropriate consideration to any reasonable alternative to closure and evaluated these accordingly as outlined in their options appraisal paper. In undertaking their options appraisal, the council gave well-balanced consideration to any potential impact of the closure on the local community, the environment and children, young people and other school users. A pre-consultation exercise was carried out with the community to help inform the options appraisal. Information on pupil numbers, house building and financial implications were also sought and presented as part of this exercise.

4. Summary

Perth and Kinross Council's proposal to permanently discontinue education provision at Forteviot Primary School, making consequent changes to catchment areas, is of clear educational benefit. Since the mothballing of the school in October 2016, the Forteviot pupils have become well-integrated into Forgandenny Primary School, benefiting from being educated alongside a larger peer group at every stage. The children have adjusted well to the move and to the minimal additional travel involved and overall there has been no detrimental impact. Alternative options to closure have been very well-considered. With a declining and unsustainable school roll and facilities now requiring significant investment, potential savings can be secured as a result of the closure, minimising the impact of any cuts to education services and contributing to the council's vision of best value. There are no significant objections to the proposal as it stands. In finalising the proposal, the council should reassure children and their families about future long term travel arrangements for children in the Forteviot catchment area. It should also continue to engage with the Forteviot community regarding any future plans for the Forteviot Primary School building.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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