

# **Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Perth and Kinross Council to close Blairingone Primary School, move pupils to Fossoway Primary School and that the delineated catchment area of Fossoway Primary School be permanently extended to subsume the whole delineated catchment area of Blairingone 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 ("the 2010 Act"). The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Perth and Kinross Council's proposal to close Blairingone Primary School, move pupils to Fossoway Primary School and that the delineated catchment area of Fossoway Primary School be permanently extended to subsume the whole delineated catchment area of Blairingone 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 statutory 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 and young people of Blairingone Primary School, Fossoway Primary School; 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:

- attendance at the public meetings in Fossoway Primary School on 6 September 2018 and at Blairingone Primary School on 18 September 2018 in connection with the council's proposals;

- 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 site of Blairingone Primary School and Fossoway Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Blairingone 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.

2.2 The formal consultation ran from 27 August 2018 to 5 October 2018. Copies of the proposal were made available electronically on the council website. Two hundred and thirty one letters were issued to identified stakeholders with a link to the proposal paper and details of where and how to obtain a paper copy. An online response form was set up on the consultation website. A public notice advert was placed in the local press on 27 August 2018. Public meetings were held at Fossoway Primary School on 6 September 2018 and at Blairingone Primary School on 18 September 2018. No members of the public attended the public meeting at Fossoway Primary School. Twelve members of the public attended the public meeting at Blairingone Primary School. The majority were not in favour of the proposal.

2.3 The council received five online responses. Of these, one response agreed with the council's proposal and four disagreed. In addition, six written responses were received. Of these, two were from parents, two from elected members and two from other interested stakeholders including local businesses. All of the written responses did not agree with the proposals. Key areas of concern included: how the needs of individual children would be met in a larger school, the potential impact on future house building and ability to attract families into the area and the increased volume of traffic at Fossoway Primary School. An online petition against the proposal 'Save our rural School, Blairingone Primary School' obtained 374 signatures. Of these, nine were identified as Blairingone or Fossoway residents.

## **3. Educational Aspects of Proposal**

3.1 Blairingone Primary School is a non-denominational school providing education to P1–P7 pupils from the village of Blairingone and surrounding area. There is no nursery provision at Blairingone Primary School. Local nursery provision is located at Fossoway Primary School. The school structure has one composite class across stages Primary 1-7. At the time of the HM Inspector's visit the class consisted of two P2s, one P3, one P6 and one P7. Children currently enjoy a positive and supportive learning environment. There is no physical education hall at

Blairingone Primary School. In January 2017, Blairingone Primary School was rated as 'B' (satisfactory) for building condition and 'B' (satisfactory) for educational suitability. Community use of Blairingone Primary School is limited with occasional use by the Community Council. Data suggests the roll of Blairingone Primary School has been falling over the last five years. Future projections indicate that pupil numbers are unlikely to increase above their current level. Out of 17 children who could attend the school, currently 12 attend neighbouring schools. If this pattern of parental choice continues, then the future sustainability of Blairingone is more challenging.

3.2 The council has set out a reasonable case in support of its proposal. The council states there will be a number of educational benefits for children if the proposal goes ahead. These include improved social interaction opportunities from attending a larger school among children of their own age. Participating in larger year groups will increase the opportunity for collaborative working with children of a similar age and stage of development. Opportunities to engage in a wider range of activities which enrich the curriculum will be increased. Children will benefit from participating in lunchtime and after school activities and the Fossoway House System. Children will benefit from access to physical education on site, rather than having to travel to other schools. Co-location of the nursery in an open plan layout alongside the P1 class will improve the transition experience. Impact on the wider Blairingone community will be minimal as the school is not regularly used for community activity. The proposal will assist the council to make efficient and effective use of its resources as it will not incur costs for running Blairingone Primary School. Fossoway Primary School has the capacity to accommodate additional children as occupancy, based on Census 2017, was 71.3%.

3.3 Parents, children and staff from Blairingone Primary School who met with HM Inspectors did not support the proposal. Parents and staff did not agree that there would be any educational benefits for Blairingone children. Concerns were expressed about the perceived loss of the inclusive, supportive environment the children currently experience. Children enjoy the relaxed atmosphere. The small numbers make it easier for them to interact. Both parents and children were concerned about the potential for bullying in a larger school. Parents felt there would be a reduction in the quality of the educational experience and individual attention. Parents did not accept the projected roll figures. They felt that future housing developments would lead to an increase in the number of children locally. Parents acknowledged that the lack of local nursery provision and parents exercising the right to send their child to other schools contributed to the low numbers at Blairingone. Parents were not happy about their children being bussed to school and the possible increased congestion around Fossoway Primary School. Concern was expressed about the loss of the school as a community facility.

3.4 Parents, including those who live in the Blairingone Primary School catchment area, children and staff from Fossoway Primary School who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal. They thought that engagement with a wider peer group at age and stage would improve children's learning. The co-location and open plan nature of the nursery and lower primary department would improve transition. Children would benefit from access to a wider pool of staff including a full-time Pupil Support Teacher. Attending a larger school would better prepare children for the

transition to secondary school. Parents thought the proposal would make better use of limited resources in a time of financial constraints. Fossoway children would welcome improved social opportunities and the chance to make new friends. They thought Blairingone children would benefit from having access to an increased range of physical education activities and lunchtime clubs and opportunities to participate in inter-school team events. Parents, staff and children did not have any concerns about potential increase in the volume of traffic and impact on safety if the proposal proceeds.

3.5 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school, HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of the factors to which it should have special regard. In arriving at its proposal the council has clearly assessed the likely benefits to children and in doing so has given due consideration to any reasonable alternatives. The council carried out a detailed options assessment in which it considered four options. These included: Keeping Blairingone Primary School open; mothballing Blairingone Primary School and moving children to Fossoway Primary School; closing Blairingone Primary School and moving children to Fossoway Primary School; and reviewing the catchment area of Blairingone Primary School to determine whether or not this would increase the roll to a sustainable level. Due to insufficient demand, coupled with parents choosing to place their children at other primary schools, none of the options bar closure were considered as viable or sustainable. The current school building is not used regularly for community activity. The proposal does not impact negatively on children at Fossoway Primary School. Blairingone children will be entitled to free transport. The journey time is not unreasonable when compared with other parts of the authority.

#### **4. Summary**

Perth and Kinross Council's proposal to close Blairingone Primary School, move pupils to Fossoway Primary School and permanently extend the Fossoway Primary School delineated catchment area to subsume the whole delineated catchment area of Blairingone Primary School has clear educational benefits. Blairingone Primary School children currently enjoy learning in an inclusive and supportive environment. However, Blairingone children will have access to greater learning opportunities, wider experiences and increased socialisation through being part of a larger school at Fossoway. Opportunities to engage in lunchtime, after school and team events will be increased. Transition from the nursery class to the P1 class will be enhanced. Projected numbers of children within the catchment are insufficient to make the school viable. A significant factor in this is parental placing requests to other schools. Fossoway Primary School has the capacity to accommodate additional children. The proposal will assist the council to deliver 'Best Value' through making more efficient and effective use of its resources. In taking forward the proposal the council should set out how it will ensure current Blairingone children are supported to positively make the transition to Fossoway School. It should also work with parents

to address the concerns they raised such as bullying and travelling by bus. The council should also consider how the vacant school might be used to the benefit of the local Blairingone community.

**HM Inspectors  
Education Scotland  
October 2018**