

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Perth and Kinross Council to close Greenloaning Primary School.

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 Greenloaning Primary School. 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 and the special provisions that apply to proposals to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the Greenloaning Primary School and Braco 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:

- 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 Greenloaning Primary School and Braco 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 the closure of Greenloaning 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 with reference to the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

2.2 The council undertook its consultation from 27 August to 5 October 2018. An advertisement was placed in local newspapers and a letter containing a link to an electronic copy of the proposal document was sent to stakeholders. A public meeting held on 11 September 2018 was attended by 15 people. The council received three responses to its consultation of which two agreed with the proposal and one disagreed. Those who responded raised questions about the sufficiency of space for early years provision in the area and felt that the school building should be retained for community use.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Greenloaning Primary School was officially mothballed in October 2016 when the school roll dropped to four pupils. Since then, children zoned for Greenloaning Primary School have attended Braco Primary School. Perth and Kinross Council proposes to permanently discontinue the provision of a primary school at Greenloaning with effect from June 2019. Thereafter, children would receive their primary education at Braco Primary School.

3.2 Perth and Kinross Council's proposal has clear educational benefits. The council has concluded that there is no foreseeable prospect of an increased and stable pupil roll at Greenloaning Primary School. The council's proposal would be consistent with its statutory duty to secure best value in the use of resources.

3.3 The school roll at Braco Primary School is currently 51 pupils. The school has capacity for 68. It currently has three primary classes and a nursery. Children attending Braco Primary School would benefit from learning and participation with their peers and have access to a broader range of teachers and other staff. Children would benefit from better transition experiences from nursery to primary stages. Staff would benefit from greater opportunities for professional dialogue at Braco Primary School including arrangements for peer support in assessment and moderation.

3.4 The council proposes to undertake refurbishment work at Braco Primary School and the village hall to improve the environment for learning. It has approved budget for this purpose. The council proposes to make temporary use of the Greenloaning Primary School building during these works. In its final paper, the council will need to provide details of its timescale for this work and, if possible, further details on the work proposed.

3.5 Children, parents and staff who spoke with HM Inspectors supported the proposal and agreed with the educational benefits outlined by the council. Parents

were concerned about the lack of a safe walking route between Greenloaning and Braco Primary School and welcomed the council's assurances that transport would be provided. Parents were concerned that there might not be enough space at Braco Primary School to meet demand for local nursery provision. The council will need to provide assurance on this point in its final paper.

3.6 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.

3.7 Prior to the statutory consultation Perth and Kinross Council undertook a pre-consultation exercise to inform an options appraisal for the future of Greenloaning Primary School. The council put forward a clear rationale for its proposal. Five alternative options were explored in detail, including an option to consider closing Braco Primary School and extend Greenloaning Primary School. This option would have required a greater number of children to travel from Braco to Greenloaning. The council concluded appropriately that the permanent closure of Greenloaning Primary School was the only reasonable option.

3.8 The council considered the likely effects on the local community and concluded that there would be little effect on the sustainability of the community arising from the closure of Greenloaning Primary School. The council has indicated that the closure of the school would provide an opportunity to use the school building as a facility for community use. In its proposal paper, the council outlined potential opportunities to progress alternative uses for the school building, including community asset transfer, lease or sale of the building. In its final paper, the council will need to include details of how it will engage with the local community to explore future use of the school building.

3.9 The council considered the likely effect of different travel arrangements arising from its proposal and concluded reasonably that given the short distance of approximately two miles between the schools the impact of different travel arrangements would be limited. The council has undertaken to provide transport for children affected by its proposal.

4. Summary

Perth and Kinross Council's proposal has clear educational benefits. It will enable the council to secure best value and make best use of educational resources. It will provide pupils with opportunities to learn and participate with their peers and improve children's experiences of transition from nursery to primary stages. The proposal will enable staff to work together and share practice more easily. In its final paper, the council will need to provide a timescale for refurbishment of Braco Primary School

and village hall and provide reassurance to parents on sufficient capacity for early years provision. The council will also need to outline its plans to engage with the local community on options for future use of the Greenloaning Primary School building.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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