

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Perth and Kinross Council to permanently discontinue education provision at Struan Primary School, extend the delineated catchment area of Blair Atholl Primary School to subsume the former Struan Primary School catchment area and for children from the former Struan catchment area to permanently receive their education at Blair Atholl Primary School.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by 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 Struan Primary School, extend the delineated catchment area of Blair Atholl Primary School to subsume the former Struan Primary School catchment area and for children from the former Struan catchment area to permanently receive their education at Blair Atholl 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 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 Blair Atholl and Struan Primary Schools; 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 site of Blair Atholl and Struan Primary Schools, 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 Struan 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* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The formal consultation ran from 17 August until 28 September 2016. The council posted the consultation document on its website. It issued letters advising of the proposal to parents in the catchment areas of Struan and Blair Atholl Primary Schools, the Parent Council of Blair Atholl Primary School and other statutory consultees. The council placed advance notice of a public meeting in the local newspapers. The meeting held on 20 September 2016 was attended by less than ten stakeholders, the majority of whom were supportive of the proposal. Less than ten written communications were received in response to the consultation. One local resident disagreed with the proposal and would like Struan Primary School to re-open.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Struan Primary School is a rural school which was mothballed at the end of session 2010-11, when the school roll fell to three children. Projections for the next four years predict a maximum roll of eight children. Blair Atholl Primary School, which is situated five miles away, currently has a roll of 21 pupils with a further ten expected to make the transition into P1 from the nursery in August 2017. It is managed as part of a shared headship with Logierait Primary School and the children from both schools regularly come together to learn. This broadens children's social experiences by meeting larger numbers of children of similar ages.

3.2 The proposal will bring educational benefits to children in Perth and Kinross Council. If the proposal goes ahead, children who live in the catchment area which served Struan Primary School will learn as part of a larger teaching group. This larger number and wider range of peers allows increased opportunities for socialising and making friends. The larger peer group also allows children to engage more appropriately in peer and self-assessment activities. It provides greater opportunities to be involved in group learning activities and team sports which contribute positively

to children's social and emotional development. Children have access to a wider range of clubs and activities including netball, cycling, cookery, art and music.

3.3 None of the parents objected to the proposal. They recognise the benefits afforded to their children in attending a larger school with a greater number of children. Parents see benefits for their children in having good access to visiting physical education, drama and Gaelic specialists. Parents and staff also see benefits in children making the transition from the nursery class into primary and from primary to secondary education as part of a larger group.

3.4 Children who met with HM Inspectors are all in favour of the proposal. Those who live in the Struan catchment area would not wish to be educated in Struan Primary School were it to re-open. All children are positive about learning within larger groups. They are keen to cooperate as members of the three 'houses' within Blair Atholl Primary School and enjoy the competition between the 'houses'. They readily take on areas of responsibility, with the older children acting as role models for the younger ones. Children also take on various roles which help develop them as responsible citizens. They are proud of the sense of cooperation between all of the children in the school. They spoke very positively about the experiences and resources within the school and of the very extensive outdoor areas for learning and for play.

3.5 During the consultation a consultee identified an alleged inaccuracy in the proposal. The council will need to ensure that it takes the necessary steps to investigate this alleged inaccuracy. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address the alleged inaccuracy notified to it.

3.6 In arriving at its proposal, the council has given appropriate consideration to any reasonable alternatives. Through mothballing, they have provided time for full consideration and sought to allow time for any increase in the local population.

3.7 The proposal will allow the council to make efficient and effective use of its resources as it will not be burdened with maintaining a 'mothballed' building.

3.8 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. Perth and Kinross Council undertook a detailed options appraisal prior to undertaking the consultation on its proposal, including consideration of four alternative options to closure. These were re-opening Struan Primary School within its existing catchment area; continuation of mothballing; changing the catchment area of Struan Primary School to increase pupil numbers and closure of Blair Atholl Primary School and rezoning pupils to Struan Primary School. The council also considered the alternative school zoning arrangement of transferring Struan Primary School pupils to Pitlochry Primary School. Following discussion with stakeholders and detailed examination of the potential alternative options the council reasonably concluded that its consultation proposal was the best option available.

3.9 Perth and Kinross Council also gave appropriate consideration to the impact on the community from its proposal. Rural and economic impact assessments

conducted by the council identify few negative impacts, which all parents consider are outweighed by the positive benefits of their children being educated in Blair Atholl Primary School. Although previously used for occasional community events, the school building has not been used for lets and activities since August 2011. Should the Struan Primary School building cease to be used for educational purposes, under a title restriction, it must be offered back to the Duke of Atholl estate.

3.10 Perth and Kinross Council examined the effect of different travelling arrangements arising from its proposal. It concluded appropriately that the five miles between the two schools is a reasonable travel distance. The environmental impact of additional travel is off-set by the closure of the Struan Primary School building.

4. Summary

The proposal to discontinue education provision at Struan Primary School and extend the catchment area of Blair Atholl Primary School has strong educational benefits. The larger number and wider range of peers in Blair Atholl Primary School allows increased opportunities for socialising and making friends. The larger peer group enables children to engage more appropriately in group learning activities and in peer and self-assessment. Pupils, parents and staff support the council's plans. The proposal will also demonstrate best value for the council through more efficient use of the school estate. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies notified to it.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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