

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Stirling Council to permanently close Trossachs Primary School and add its catchment area to the delineated catchment area of Callander Primary School.

February 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 Stirling Council's proposal to permanently close Trossachs Primary School and add its catchment area to the delineated catchment area of Callander Primary School. Trossachs Primary School has been 'mothballed' since August 2016. 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 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 of the school; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children 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 meeting held on 9 January 2019 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 sites of Trossachs Primary School and Callander 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 Trossachs Primary School, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any different travelling arrangements of the proposed closure. Trossachs Primary School has been classified by Scottish Ministers as a remote rural school.

2. Consultation process

2.1 Stirling Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The council undertook a range of pre-consultation activities in September and October 2018 to inform stakeholders about the proposal which would be taken to the Children and Young People Committee in November 2018. This included attendance at Community Council, Parent Council and staff meetings, as well as sending written communication to parents of children who live in the catchment area of Trossachs Primary School, and to those whose children attend Callander Primary School and McLaren High School. An information booklet about the proposal was shared and made available at Callander Primary School and McLaren High School.

2.3 The consultation ran from 3 December 2018 to 8 February 2019. Notice of the consultation and details of the public meeting were advertised through social media by the council. A consultation page was available on the Stirling Council website throughout the consultation period to provide information and to invite responses. Consultation meetings were held by authority officers with children and staff during December 2018. The public meeting was held in Brig o'Turk Village Hall on 9 January 2019, which was attended by 15 members of the public. Following the public meeting, letters were sent to every household in the Trossachs Primary School catchment area. Authority officers also attended Callander Primary School Parent Council to consult with parents. Fourteen written responses to the proposal were received during the consultation period. Of these, six responses supported the proposal, three opposed the proposal, four recommended extending the mothballing of the school and one neither supported nor opposed the proposal.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council has set out a number of reasonable arguments in support of its proposal. The council states there will be educational benefits for children if the proposal goes ahead. These benefits are generally the advantages of attending a larger school. These include the greater range of opportunities for children's achievement beyond the school day, including lunchtime and after-school clubs, some of which are run by children. A larger school with more staff and greater resources supports a wider curriculum, including the learning of languages and access to information technology to improve digital skills. The significantly higher school roll presents increased opportunities for children to work with their peers in pairs, small groups or cohorts. Callander Primary School can offer a broader range of sporting opportunities such as rugby, football, cricket, netball and athletics, and has easy access to facilities in the school and at the nearby McLaren High School. All children benefit from regular involvement in citizenship groups, including First Aid, Eco Schools and Road Safety, which focus on improving the school environment and its community. Work-related opportunities exist with local partnerships including the National Park, the Callander Youth Project and a local care home. The location of Callander Primary School leads to more straightforward transition from nursery to primary and from primary to secondary school as these establishments are in walking distance of each other. Overall, these are all benefits which are already being experienced by children as Trossachs Primary School is mothballed and the majority of children from its catchment area are now attending Callander Primary School.

3.2 Children at Callander Primary School, including those who previously attended Trossachs Primary School, identify many advantages to being at their own school, including the citizenship groups, the house team meetings and the after-school clubs. They like having more peers and a greater number of teachers. Parents, including parents of children who previously attended Trossachs Primary School, feel that there were too few children to make the smaller school viable and that children needed a wider peer group. Facilities at Trossachs Primary School were also

more limited. Parents are very keen that savings made through the closure of Trossachs Primary School should be re-invested in Callander Primary School. Callander Primary School staff, including those who had worked at Trossachs Primary School, agree with the proposal for closure. Whilst there were options for flexibility in the curriculum, they feel the lack of peer groups for children was a significant issue. Some members of the community who attended the public meeting were keen for the building to be retained for an alternative purpose, such as an outdoor learning centre. They would prefer the mothballing to be extended whilst options are explored.

3.3 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. The council considered possible alternatives to the proposal prior to consultation. One alternative would be the continued 'mothballing' of Trossachs Primary School. However, this would exceed the three years recommended for this approach in the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

3.4 The other alternative considered was reopening the school. However, the roll had dropped to zero when the school was mothballed and roll projections are static or decreasing in the foreseeable future with no new housing planned in the area with only one current planning application under consideration since January 2018. Parents enrolling children for education have been given the option of nominating Trossachs Primary School but no one has done so since 2016. The council identified educational benefits for children attending Callander Primary School in its proposal paper and was clear that there was no implication that some of these benefits did not exist in Trossachs Primary School. However, they do apply to the proposed rezoned school of Callander Primary School.

3.5 The council further considered the likely impact of closure on the local community. It observed that the school building was only used for the purpose of educating primary-aged children during school hours as there is a local village hall which is used for community purposes, and so the school building was not used as a hub of community life. Currently, all children from the Trossachs Primary School catchment area who attend Callander Primary School are transported by the council in a single vehicle to Callander, which is 6.4 miles away by road. This arrangement will continue if the proposal is accepted. The council has identified that two other local primary schools are within reasonable travelling distance: Aberfoyle (8.3 miles) and Strathyre (13.4 miles).

4. Summary

Stirling Council's proposal to close Trossachs Primary School and permanently extend the Callander Primary School delineated catchment area to subsume the whole delineated catchment area of Trossachs Primary School has clear educational benefits which are currently being experienced by children. Parents, children and staff are agreed about the educational benefits of the proposal. In taking the proposal forward, the council needs to continue to engage with all stakeholders and ensure that the local community is supported in exploring options for alternative use of the Trossachs Primary School building.

**HM Inspectors
February 2019**