

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Falkirk Council to permanently close Bothkennar Primary School.

April 2021

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 Falkirk Council's proposal to permanently close Bothkennar 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 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 schools; any other users; 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 virtual public meeting held on 2 March 2021 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
- a virtual visit to the site of Beancross Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal will lead to the closure of a rural school(s), HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Bothkennar 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 Falkirk Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The consultation process ran from 8 February to 2 April 2021. An online meeting was held on 9 March 2021 which was attended by two members of the public. The main area of concern raised was the future impact on the village should the school close permanently. The council received seven responses to the online survey and by email. Six responses were in favour of the proposal and one against. The respondent disagreeing was not a child, parent, member of staff or local resident.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Following consultation with affected parents and the school community, Bothkennar Primary School was been mothballed by Falkirk Council in August 2019. During school session 2018-2019, the pupil roll at Bothkennar Primary School fell to four pupils after a prolonged period of declining numbers. As the primary aged population in the catchment area has not increased, nor is likely to increase in the future, the council proposes to permanently close Bothkennar Primary School. The catchment area of Beancross Primary School would be changed permanently to reflect this.

3.2 HM Inspectors agree with some, but not all, aspects of the council's educational benefits statement and are confident that there is sufficient merit to consider the permanent closure of the school.

3.3 Stakeholders who spoke with HM Inspectors were all in favour of the council's proposal. They recognise the benefits of attending Beancross Primary School. These include larger peer groups allowing children to make new friendships and continuity in educational provision from ages 3-12. A bigger staff team provides a range of possibilities in supporting more flexibly children's learning needs. Children work in classes of their own age group and are experiencing increased pace and challenge in their work. In addition, children have access to visiting specialist teachers. Lessons are experienced by children within their stage at Beancross rather than in a multi-composite arrangement. Children who spoke to HM Inspectors shared their favourable experiences of, and easier access to, clubs such as coding, woodwork, cookery and animation that they enjoy at Beancross. They welcome increased choices and opportunities to undertake leadership roles such as 'buddies' to children in P1 and in the nursery.

3.4 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 has continued to monitor the pupil roll at the school and engage with the school community. There are sound reasons to consider the long term viability of the school. The overwhelming messages about children's experiences in Beancross Primary are positive. The council has not, however, outlined in detail how it considered any reasonable alternatives to closure of the school before it consulted on the proposal. Most members of the local community accept the rationale for the school closure. Travelling arrangements for children will continue with free transport provided for the relatively short travel distance of between two and three miles.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors' agree there are clear educational benefits for children in Beancross Primary School. Stakeholders value the socialisation with larger peer groups, access to a wider range of clubs and activities and opportunities for leadership provided in the bigger school. Most stakeholders agree with the council's proposals. Parents, staff and children agree that children's experiences have improved in the new setting. The proposal will assist the council to meet its statutory duty with respect to best value. The council should more clearly outline to the community

the work it undertook to examine alternatives to the closure of the school. Should the proposal go ahead, the council should work with the local community to explore the possible future use of the school building.

HM Inspectors
April 2021