

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to discontinue education provision at Duror Primary School and reassign its catchment area to Ballachulish Primary School.

May 2024

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by His 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 a proposal by The Highland Council to discontinue education provision at Duror Primary School and reassign its catchment area to Ballachulish 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' view. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it alongside any relevant considerations the council received and then prepare its consultation report. The council's 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 consultation report at least three weeks before it takes its final decision. With all proposals the council needs to follow all statutory obligations set out in the 2010 Act. Where a council is proposing to close a school, there are specific additional obligations. These include notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers. There are special provisions that apply 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 and young people in the council area; and in the community;
- 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 16 April 2024 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 Duror Primary School and Ballachulish Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal, if implemented, 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 Duror 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 The Highland Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The statutory consultation for the closure of Duror Primary School ran from 4 March to 3 May 2024. Copies of the proposal were made available online and at Duror Primary School. The proposal document was sent to relevant stakeholders, including parents and carers of Duror Primary School and Ballachulish Primary School, and local community councils. A public meeting was held on 16 April 2024. This was attended by 23 members of the public, including teachers from Duror Primary School. The council received 23 written submissions from local residents, almost all do not support the proposal. A few of these responses were from parents with children who live in or are moving to the area who disagree with the proposal to close the school. The council also gathered the views of the four children who attend Duror Primary School. All stated that they enjoy learning at the school.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Duror Primary School is designated as a remote, rural school. The council predict that the school roll will fall from four to two children from August 2024. In November 2023, The Highland Council held an informal discussion with parents and staff about the future of the school, including mothballing the school on a temporary basis. The council also communicated the outcome of the discussion with parents to Duror and Kentallen Community Council. All stakeholders felt strongly that the school should remain open.

3.2 The council state that closing Duror Primary School may provide educational benefits. These include, improving pre-school to primary transition as there is a pre-school class at Ballachulish Primary School. That primary to secondary transition would likely be easier if children are able to move alongside friends from primary school. They also state that moving to a larger school would provide more opportunities for working with others. HM Inspectors agree that children benefit from having opportunities to play and learn alongside peers. HM Inspectors met with school staff. They stated that the cluster arrangements and single headteacher across Duror, Ballachulish, St Bride's and Glencoe Primary Schools works well to support learning. They believe that this provides a consistent approach to learning and teaching across all four schools. Staff are confident that children from Duror benefit sufficiently through shared learning experiences with their peers from across cluster schools. Overall, HM Inspectors agree that there can be challenges to providing education in a very small school. However, existing arrangements are addressing some of these challenges and that school size shouldn't be the only determining factor for considering closure.

3.3 HM Inspectors met with children, parents, community members and staff. Almost all stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors were not supportive of the council's proposal to close Duror Primary School. They expressed concern that closing the school would make the area less desirable for families to move to, resulting in a longer-term negative impact on the local community. They also note that children currently attending Duror Primary School have a very positive learning experience. They also have good access to local amenities which helps access to outdoor learning which could be extended across the cluster. Almost all stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors believe that, should the council proceed with the closure of Duror Primary School, the catchment area should be realigned to St Bride's Primary School rather than Ballachulish Primary School. They state that the historical boundary issues were resolved with the erection of the Ballachulish bridge. As a result, realignment to St Bride's Primary School would be better for those parents who need to commute. All children that met with HM Inspectors enjoy the learning in their current environment and value the experience to mix regularly with other children

within the school cluster. They are concerned that they would no longer have access to the woodland area behind the school and Cuil Bay which supports outdoor learning.

3.4 As the proposal, if implemented, 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. Most children are able to travel to school by foot or bicycle and appreciate the opportunities for outdoor learning with the natural resources of the surrounding area. Community members that met with HM Inspectors raised questions about the accuracy of the predicted pupil roll for Duror Primary School. They highlighted that there are seven families living within the Duror catchment area who have pre-school children. They also highlighted that land is secured and plans are in development to build 40 new houses within the current catchment area. Stakeholders are also concerned about the future use of the building. Parents and toddlers enjoy recently developed weekly 'play and stay' and 'bookbug' sessions at Duror Primary School and would be concerned if these would stop.

3.5 The council has assessed the effects of its proposal on children and the community. It has not identified any significant impacts from the closure of the school. Duror and Kentallen Community Council would like the council to liaise with the local community about the number of pre-school children in the current catchment. They also believe that the council should revisit its Equality Impact Assessment to consider the needs of those with protected characteristics. If the proposal is agreed the council should work with stakeholders to address their concerns.

3.6 During the consultation period consultees identified alleged inaccuracies in the proposal, including the condition rating of the school and pre-school provision within the school. The council will need to ensure that it takes the necessary steps to investigate these alleged inaccuracies. In its consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies notified to it.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree with some, but not all, of the educational benefits outlined in the proposal. In the current context, the potential limitations of the small school roll could be mitigated by the cluster approach. Children, parents and staff state that joint working arrangements across the cluster are working well. They are providing valuable learning and teaching experiences for children to engage regularly with their peers from the other cluster schools. The council should engage more thoroughly with parents and members of the community, particularly around alternative options to the proposal. This should include consideration of the number of pre-school children living in the current catchment area, and an assessment of any planned housing developments. In preparing its consultation paper, it would be helpful if the council could outline the projected school roll of Duror Primary School. Should the council proceed with the proposal, it will be important to have further discussions with parents about the most appropriate change to the catchment area. A few consultees and stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors believe there are inaccuracies or omissions in the proposal document. In its consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies or omissions notified to it.

HM Inspectors
May 2024