

# **Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010**

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council to discontinue education provision at Minard Primary School and to realign the catchment area to Lochgilphead and Furnace Primary Schools.**

September 2023

## 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 Argyll and Bute Council's proposal to discontinue education provision at Minard Primary School and to realign the catchment area to Lochgilphead and Furnace Primary Schools. 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; 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 public meeting held on 29 August 2023 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 Inveraray Primary School, Furnace Primary School and Lochgilphead Joint Campus, 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 Minard 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 Argyll and Bute Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The council undertook the consultation between 15 June and 13 September 2023. The proposal was communicated via the council website and a copy provided to key stakeholders. The consultation paper was made available in several local venues and council offices. Argyll and Bute Council held a public meeting at Minard Primary School on 29 August 2023. This was attended by nine members of the local community, local elected members and council officers. No parents attended. The council received five responses to the online consultation and almost all agreed with the proposal to close the school.

2.3 Overall, all attendees at the public meeting and those who responded to the consultation agree that Minard Primary School is no longer viable. While they are disappointed to lose the school within the village, they agree that it should close. However, several local residents are concerned about the council's proposal to split the Minard Primary School catchment between two different primary schools. In their responses, they have suggested an alternative proposal to realign the whole of the Minard catchment to Furnace Primary School. This would, in their view, help to maintain a unified village and local community identity. The council should consider this alternative proposal and assess if this would be a suitable alternative to their original proposed alignment. Discussions at the public meeting also focused on the potential future use of the site. If the council decides to close the school, they should continue to work with the local community to explore alternative uses for the school and grounds.

## 3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council has set out clearly the educational benefits arising from the proposal for children from the Minard Primary School catchment to attend either Lochgilphead Primary School or a split placement between Furnace and Inveraray Primary Schools. The council has considered and highlighted the positive educational benefits in relation to: learning and teaching; meeting learners needs; broadening the range of educational experiences; and the environment for learning. HM Inspectors agree that there can be educational benefits for children, including opportunities to learn, develop and socialise with a wider group of peers. The council has highlighted one negative aspect around additional travel. However, HM Inspectors agree that the positive aspects of the proposal outweigh this negative aspect.

3.2 Almost all staff, parents and children, that HM Inspectors met with, agree with the council's proposal to permanently close Minard Primary School. A few people were unhappy that there would no longer be an option for children to attend a school in the village in the future. They did, however, understand the reasons why the council was proposing closure. The children that HM Inspectors spoke with, who attend either Furnace/Inveraray Primary Schools or Lochgilphead Primary School, are happy with the current arrangements. Almost all of them said that they would not wish to attend Minard Primary School if it were to re-open. All of the children who live in Minard hope that the school and the grounds can be repurposed in the future for the benefit of the local community.

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.

3.4 The council took appropriate steps to consider reasonable alternatives to closing Minard Primary School through an options appraisal and engagement with stakeholders prior to moving ahead with the consultation. The alternatives included: re-opening Minard Primary School;

continuing to mothball Minard Primary School with the pupils zoned to Furnace Primary School; and closing Minard Primary School and realigning its catchment area to Furnace and Lochgilphead Primary Schools. The council has considered the impact on the community if the school is closed. The school, which was in the past a hub within the village, has the potential to be repurposed. This could have a positive impact on the local community in the future. The council has also considered the likely effect of different travelling arrangements, which would essentially be the same as those in place while the school has been mothballed. The travelling time between Minard and Lochgilphead is around twice the time between Minard and Furnace. In finalising the alignment of catchment boundaries, the council may wish to consider the alternative suggestion to realign the whole of the Minard catchment area to Furnace Primary School.

#### **4. Summary**

HM Inspectors agree that there are potential educational benefits for children arising from the council's proposal to close Minard Primary School. For example, that there can be more opportunities for them to learn, develop and socialise with a wider group of their peers. A few stakeholders have questioned the proposal to split the Minard catchment. The council should take these views into consideration when finalising the alignment of catchment boundaries, if they decide to close Minard Primary School. The council should also work with the local community, including children and young people, to consider any alternative use for the school and grounds taking account of local needs, views and aspirations.

**HM Inspectors**  
**September 2023**