

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council to close Kilchrenan Primary School and realign its catchment area to Taynuilt Primary School.

March 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 from Argyll and Bute Council to close Kilchrenan Primary School and realign its catchment area to Taynuilt 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 school; 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:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 25 January 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 sites of Taynuilt Primary School and Oban High 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 Kilchrenan 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(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 In March 2022, Argyll and Bute Council approved the mothballing of Kilchrenan Primary School. In March 2023, the council agreed to undertake a preliminary consultation and options appraisal required by the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. The council considered four options including the reopening of Kilchrenan Primary School, continued mothballing with the pupils zoned to Taynuilt Primary School, and reopening of Kilchrenan Primary School and realigning its catchment area. In December 2023, the council agreed to proceed with the fourth option, to consult on a proposal to permanently close Kilchrenan Primary School from 29 November 2024, and to realign the catchment area to Taynuilt Primary School.

2.3 The council undertook the consultation between 21 December 2023 and 23 February 2024. The proposal notice and a summary was advertised in the local press and sent to relevant consultees. The full proposal document was published on the council website and was made available in several locations. Argyll and Bute Council held a public meeting at Kilchrenan Village Hall on 25 January 2024, which was attended by five members of the local community. The discussion covered a range of topics including clarification around catchment areas, travel to school, and details regarding the educational provision at Taynuilt Primary School. In addition, there was further discussion about the potential future use of the school building if the closure is approved. The council did not receive any written responses to the consultation.

2.4 In January 2024, council officials met with small groups of children in Taynuilt Primary School and St Columba's Primary School to discuss the proposal. Most of the children were from the Kilchrenan Primary School catchment. Feedback from the focus groups shows that the children are settled at school and benefitting from the educational provided.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council has set out clearly the educational benefits arising from the proposal to close Kilchrenan Primary School and realign its catchment area to Taynuilt Primary School. HM Inspectors agree that there are educational benefits for children. These include access to a broader range of experiences, an improved learning environment, and opportunities to learn, develop and socialise with a wider group of peers.

3.2 HM Inspectors met with a few staff, primary school children from the Kilchrenan catchment, and young people in Oban High School who had previously attended Kilchrenan Primary School. All of these stakeholders agree with the proposal. Children and staff at Taynuilt Primary School highlighted some of the educational benefits in the proposal including better spaces for outdoor learning and access to more opportunities and experiences. Whilst the young people at Oban High School have fond memories of their time at Kilchrenan Primary School, they accept the school is no longer viable in the current context.

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 has clearly set out the reasons for consulting on the proposal to permanently close Kilchrenan Primary School having taken appropriate steps and due consideration of alternatives. The journey time for children is longer than it would be to Kilchrenan Primary School. Depending on where they live, for a few this can be up to an hour. However, this is not having a significant negative impact on their learning. The community currently benefit from having the use of a modern village hall. However, all stakeholders that met with HM Inspectors agree that, should the proposal proceed, it would be helpful to the community to secure an alternative use for the school building. For example, during the preliminary consultation it was suggested the building and grounds could become a small business hub or a campaign base for the creation of a Loch Awe Regional or National Park.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that there are educational benefits for children arising from the council's proposal to close Kilchrenan Primary School. For example, a larger and more modern learning environment offering access to a broader range of experiences, and opportunities to learn, develop and socialise with a wider group of peers. The council should continue to work with the local community, including children and young people, to consider any future use for the school building should the proposal to close be agreed.

HM Inspectors
March 2024