

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Scottish Borders Council to permanently close the Wilton Centre, Hawick (currently closed temporarily).

November 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 Scottish Borders Council to permanently close the Wilton Centre, Hawick (currently closed temporarily). 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.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the school; any other users; children and young people 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 23 October 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;
- visits to the sites of Wilton Centre (external visit), Inspire building, Tweedbank Primary School, Eyemouth Primary School, Eyemouth High School, Langlee Primary School, St Ronan's Primary School, Peebles High School, and Priorsford Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees;
- online discussions with relevant consultees from Peebles High School, Halyrude Primary School, and Earlston High School; and
- meetings with senior leaders and local authority representatives of Scottish Borders Council.

2. Consultation process

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

2.2 The consultation process ran from 30 September until 18 November 2024. The council's proposal was published on the council's website and in the local press. The council also used existing school and services communication channels to inform relevant stakeholders of the consultation. A public meeting was held at Hawick High School on 23 October 2024, which was attended by five people.

2.3 On 20 March 2020 in response to COVID-19 health and safety measures, the Wilton Centre closed in line with national guidance. The council continued social emotional behaviour needs (SEBN) services within local mainstream schools, which aligned with national guidance and the council's updated inclusion strategy. This involved placing the primary SEBN service under the Inclusion and Wellbeing Service (IWS) and allocating resources to secondary schools to support young people requiring SEBN services. The council now proposes to permanently close the Wilton Centre.

2.4 Eighty-one written responses were received, which represented the views of parents, school staff and other interested parties. Twelve of those respondents supported the proposal, highlighting the importance of inclusion and providing children and young people with a sense of belonging in their local school. They also noted that placing children in their local school would greatly reduce their travel time. Sixty-six responses were opposed to the proposal, citing concerns about the quality and continuation of services for SEBN within mainstream schools. In particular, how well staff could meet the more complex needs of learners alongside the needs of others. Respondents also raised concerns about the resourcing, training and specialist support that mainstream schools would require to meet the ongoing needs of all learners. Three response stated they did not know.

2.5 The views of children and young people from across the local authority were gathered through consultation meetings led by the council. A representative sample of children and young people currently being supported by the IWS were consulted. Most children and young people were in favour of the proposal, citing the benefits of feeling part of a school community, the importance of peers and friendships, and working with staff who they know and support them well. The current standard of the building was also discussed, and almost all agreed that the school should not reopen due to its poor condition.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Scottish Borders Council proposes to permanently close the Wilton Centre and transfer its functions to the IWS and individual establishments. This aims to provide children and young people with more flexible support through local universal, targeted, and specialist services and improved school-level pathways. The council highlights that Wilton Centre placements often required long travel, which can cause negative experiences. Local support would reduce transitions, helping children and young people stay in familiar environments, lower travel stress, and build a sense of community. Localised services would also enhance understanding of community resources, creating more sustainable opportunities. Accessing local support would help children and young people to develop important life skills such as self-regulation, engaging with peers, and learning from positive role models resulting in improved outcomes. HM Inspectors agree that local flexible pathways have potential education benefits.

3.2 The Wilton Centre's building limitations are cited as restricting children and young people's ability to fully participate in a curriculum tailored to their needs and strengths. Maintaining children in their local schools offers greater personalisation and choice through flexible and creative curricular pathways, enhancing educational and broader achievements. The council states that integrating the SEBN service into IWS at cluster levels would enable more agile and responsive support. In addition, offering system-wide training and resources to build capacity in mainstream schools will help to meet the needs of SEBN learners within their school cluster and community. HM Inspectors agree that the building poses limitations in how well children and young people can access a broad and balanced curriculum, suitable to meet their needs and aspirations.

3.3 HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits outlined in the proposal. However, the potential benefits of both the proposed and current approaches at the secondary stages have yet to be fully realised. While staff have taken important steps to engage young people in more relevant and meaningful ways, further work is needed to enhance whole school's understanding of nurturing principles. The aspirational aim of fully engaging young people through flexible, bespoke learning strategies within their local community has yet to be achieved. A number of young people have been supported well in transitioning more positively to secondary school, through effective support at primary school. However, staff report ongoing challenges in supporting all young people's attendance and achievements. If the proposal is agreed, it is important that young people's attendance, engagement and progress is systematically monitored and tracked more effectively, and appropriate action taken in a timely manner.

3.4 HM Inspectors engaged with primary children, parents, school staff, and headteachers as well as IWS staff. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of whole school nurturing principles and providing universal, targeted, and specialist support to address SEBN needs. They highlighted the need for effective partnership working and system-wide tracking to ensure appropriate nurture and support. Stakeholders see this as a strength of the current model. These flexible, tailored learning strategies delivered by skilled staff are helping children overcome barriers, fostering a sense of belonging, and improving their wellbeing and attainment. Stakeholders also noted the positive impact of high-quality professional learning, training, and support provided by IWS staff on learners and the development of inclusive, nurturing school environments.

3.5 In the secondary sector, stakeholders, including young people, parents, staff, and headteachers, are committed to including young people in their local schools and communities. They strive to support learners at the cluster level, providing early identification and interventions to best meet needs. Transitions from primary to secondary school are viewed as a strength leading to improved attendance, resilience, and engagement. Whilst many young people benefit from these approaches, HM Inspectors agree with stakeholders that there are areas for improvement, refining referral processes, rationalising resources, and better utilising spaces have the potential to align better with the local authority approaches to inclusion and nurture. Staff would benefit from stronger connections with the IWS team to enhance collaboration and improve access to professional learning. Addressing gaps in support, has the potential to improve further the outcomes of part-time learners and school refusers, requiring significant SEBN support. The council should consider the comments made by stakeholders and work with them to address concerns.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors support the potential educational benefits to permanently close the Wilton Centre and transfer its functions to the IWS. At the primary school level, well-developed whole-school nurturing approaches and individualised pathways align with the Scottish Borders Council's vision for inclusion and achievement within local communities. However, at the secondary school level, nurturing approaches currently require further development. For some young people there is a

need for more enhanced support through SEBN services. Concerns relating to the needs of secondary school learners who previously attended full-time placements at the Wilton Centre were raised. Similarly, clarification on roles and responsibilities, improved referral processes, enhanced staff training, and improved system wide tracking, and monitoring were also identified as concerns. If the proposal proceeds, the council should work with stakeholders to address these concerns.

**HM Inspectors
November 2024**