

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

**Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Dumfries and Galloway Council to discontinue education provision at Carsphairn Primary School and Nursery, re-assigning its catchment area to Dalry Primary School.**

December 2022

## 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 Dumfries and Galloway Council's proposal to discontinue education provision at Carsphairn Primary School and Nursery, re-assigning its catchment area to Dalry 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. In addition, special provisions apply to proposals to close a rural school.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the educational benefits the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs;
- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the settings; 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; and
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to Education Scotland on relevant educational aspects of the proposal;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- visits to the site of Carsphairn Primary School and Nursery and Dalry Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal would 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 Carsphairn Primary School and Nursery and re-assigning its catchment area to Dalry 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 Dumfries and Galloway Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The main proposal within the consultation is to discontinue education provision at Carsphairn Primary School and Nursery, re-assigning its catchment area to Dalry Primary School. The proposed school for closure has been mothballed since 2018-19. The formal consultation ran from 5 September 2022 until 14 October 2022. The council communicated the proposed statutory consultation using a range of methods, including emails to potential consultees, articles in the local newspaper and copies of the proposal were made available electronically on the council website and in paper format via central locations.

2.3 Dumfries and Galloway Council staff met with 14 pupils as part of two focus groups to discuss proposals. Almost all pupils recognised that there are social and educational benefits of attending either a small school like Carsphairn Primary School and Nursery or a larger school like Dalry Primary School.

2.4 The council issued questionnaires to the ten Carsphairn households, which it identified as having children who may choose to attend the Carsphairn Primary School and Nursery. Seven questionnaires were returned, four respondents indicated that they would choose to enrol their children at Carsphairn School and Nursery and three indicated that they would not.

2.5 Two public meetings took place on 29 September 2022, one in Dalry Primary School and the other in Lagwyne Hall, Carsphairn. The public meeting in Dalry Primary School had four attendees and the public meeting in Lagwyne Hall had 33 attendees. Almost all attendees at the public meetings raised concerns about the proposal. These included why families did not have the option to enrol their children at Carsphairn Primary School and Nursery since mothballing, the accuracy of the predicted falling roll at Dalry Primary School and the estimated travel times provided in the proposal. There were also some differing views on the potential educational benefit of larger class sizes and on the most appropriate type of Early Learning and Childcare within a rural community.

2.6 Of the 34 representations sent to the council as part of the consultation process, almost all were in opposition to the proposal. The reasons for opposition were similar to the concerns raised at the public meetings. Representations from the members of the Community Council outlined concerns that closing the school permanently did not align with their plans for the regeneration of the village.

## 3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The Carsphairn Primary School and Nursery building has been mothballed since 2018-19. Half of the children from the school's catchment area currently attend Dalry Primary School. No children have attended the nursery since the end of academic session 2011-12. In its proposal document, the council sets out its rationale for the proposed closure. Over the next five years, the council expects the school's maximum roll to be around 11 school aged children and three nursery aged children. Currently, there are ten children in the Carsphairn Primary School catchment area, five of these children attend Dalry Primary School. The council believes that if the nursery were to reopen, the building would be unlikely to meet Care Inspectorate re-registration standards. The council previously rated the Carsphairn Primary School building as C for suitability and B for condition. The building has not been reassessed since 2014. Dalry Primary School building was previously rated B for suitability and B for condition.

3.2 The council has provided its rationale and an educational benefits statement outlining how it believes its proposal to close Carsphairn Primary School will benefit children. This includes a statement that the size of the school provides significant impediments to the successful implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. HM Inspectors do not support this view and do not find that the council's proposal demonstrates clearly enough how children will benefit from the closure of the school.

3.3 Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors have concerns about the proposal. These include aspects of the educational benefits as well some financial data contained in the council's statement. Almost all disputed the estimated time for children travelling to and from Dalry Primary School from the Carsphairn catchment area. A few of those that met with HM Inspectors do not believe it is reasonable for younger children to travel the proposed distance to and from Dalry Primary School each day. A few adults who had previously worked in, and a few young people at secondary school who had attended Carsphairn Primary School and Nursery, disputed the educational benefits highlighted in the report.

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.

3.5 The council has assessed the effects of its proposal on children, young people and the community. It has not identified any significant impacts resulting from closure. HM Inspectors believe that the council should provide clearer evidence to support this view. For example, the Carsphairn Community Council believes that closing the school will negatively impact on its plans for the regeneration of the village. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to consider further the potential negative impact on the community.

## 4. Summary

Overall, HM Inspectors do not believe that the council has set out sufficiently balanced educational benefits. In taking forward this proposal, the council needs to expand on the educational benefits that the proposed closure of the school will deliver for the children who live in the school's catchment area. It should engage more thoroughly with parents and members of the community, particularly around alternatives to the proposal. Working closely with the local community, the council should revisit factors which may impact on the children and the local community should the proposal proceed. This includes the potential negative impact of travel on the children, families and the environment. Some consultees also believe there are inaccuracies in the proposal document. These may affect their ability to fully understand the benefits which the council states the closure of Carsphairn Primary School and Nursery will deliver. In its final consultation report, the council will need to set out the actions it has taken to address these concerns.

**HM Inspectors  
December 2022**