

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council to permanently close Southend Primary School.

November 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 permanently close Southend 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 27 September 2023 in connection with the council's proposal;
- 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 Southend Primary School (PS), Castlehill PS, Dalintober PS and Campbeltown Grammar School, including discussions 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 Southend PS, the likely effect on the local community and the likely effect of any changes to existing travelling arrangements.

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 Argyll and Bute Council agreed to mothball Southend PS in June 2021 when the total school roll reduced to zero pupils. The school has remained mothballed since this time. The council completed a pre-consultation and engaged with the local community in November 2022. This phase considered a number of options such as the reopening of Southend PS or realigning the catchment area of the school. The majority believed the most viable option was to formally close the school. They recognised the decline in school roll had been as a result of parents choosing to send their children to other schools within the Campbeltown area. The statutory consultation on the proposal to discontinue education provision in Southend PS ran from 31 August until 27 October 2023. A public meeting was held in the school on 27 September 2023, where seven members of the public attended. The attendees had mixed views on the proposal. A few attendees indicated that the proposal was logical. However, a few attendees highlighted concerns including the variation in journey time for those children travelling from Southend area to the primary schools in Campbeltown for children; the perceived lack of early learning and childcare provision in the area; and concern about attracting new families to the local community.

2.3 The council received four written responses to the online consultation, most of which were against the proposal. Of the responses received, the majority indicated that they would prefer the continued mothballing of the school to allow time for the community to evolve. Children attending Castlehill PS were also consulted by council officers, including children who live in the Southend catchment area. A few children expressed interest in Southend PS reopening. However, most children said their preference would be to remain at their current school if Southend PS did reopen. They indicated the benefits of attending a larger school, which increases their opportunities to socialise with a wider group of friends.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree with the council's educational benefits statement and support the permanent closure of Southend PS. Currently, almost all children from the Southend catchment attend Castlehill PS. HM Inspectors agree that children are benefitting from a broad range of experiences including team activities, as well as the increased social aspects of attending a larger school. Children benefit from a wider range of active learning strategies and strong transition processes into primary school and secondary school. Primary school staff also benefit from support across the Mid-Argyll and Kintyre cluster which supports moderation and tracking of pupil progress across stage appropriate groups.

3.2 HM Inspectors met with children and young people, parents, staff, including headteachers and other stakeholders. Almost all were supportive of the council's proposal.

3.3 Almost all of the primary-aged children who met with HM Inspectors had attended the nursery class at Southend PS. None of the children had attended Southend PS for any part of their primary school education. Overall, children are happy attending their current schools, which include Castlehill PS and Dalintober PS. In particular, older children recognise the benefits to being in a larger school community. They feel that they have lots of opportunities to participate in clubs and after-school activities and benefit from having a wide friendship group.

3.4 Overall, parents of primary-aged children that spoke to HM Inspectors are in favour of the proposal. They acknowledge that the permanent closure of Southend PS could be seen as a loss for the local community. However, they feel that their children are settled and happy at Castlehill PS and Dalintober PS. They feel that reopening Southend PS would not be feasible if early learning and childcare provision was not included. They also recognise the challenges for Argyll and Bute Council in recruiting and retaining teachers in the local area. They feel that council resources would be better allocated in Castlehill PS and Dalintober PS. However, a few parents, who through placing requests have sent their children to Dalintober PS, are unsure about the

future of their children's places at this school. They would like clarity from the council around existing placing requests and whether home to school transport would be extended to all children living in the current Southend catchment area.

3.5 Staff who have been redeployed from Southend PS to other schools are welcomed and valued as members of the school communities. However, they are disappointed in the proposed permanent closure of the school. They feel the school has had an important role in the local community over many years. This includes hosting social and community events which have now moved to Dunaverty Hall which is more centrally located in Southend village. Nevertheless, staff recognise that parental choice, alongside other social factors outwith their control, has led to a significant reduction in the school roll over time.

3.6 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. Castlehill PS and Dalintober PS are both currently under capacity and the school rolls are predicted to remain fairly stable over the next five years. Southend is a small settlement and is not identified as an area for growth in the Local Development Plan. Currently, children residing in the catchment of Southend travel to school either by private car or school transport. As Southend PS is not located in a village, the implementation of the proposal would have little effect on almost all children. The proposal, should it proceed, would have a neutral effect on the environment. Most stakeholders accept the rationale for the school closure. Most stakeholders indicated that, should the proposal go ahead, they would like a positive outcome to be found for the use of the existing Southend PS building, that could be of benefit to the community.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council will result in educational benefits for children living in the Southend PS catchment area. Children from the Southend area are settled in their current environment and value learning alongside their peers in larger schools. Parents and staff agree that children's experiences are broad and that they benefit from strong social connections. There is consensus amongst almost all stakeholders consulted that the closure of the school is inevitable, however, they recognise it will be a loss to the community. Should the proposal go ahead, the council should work with the local community to explore the potential future use of the school building. The council should provide clarification on existing placing requests and home to school transport arrangements for the parents of children from the Southend catchment who currently attend Dalintober PS.

**HM Inspectors
November 2023**