

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to discontinue education provision at Badcaul Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Ullapool Primary School.

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 The Highland Council to discontinue education provision at Badcaul Primary School, re-aligning its catchment to that of Ullapool 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' 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. There are special provisions that apply 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 10 September 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 site of Ullapool Primary School and Ullapool High School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal, if implemented, will lead to the closure of a rural school(s), HM Inspectors also took account of the council's consideration of any reasonable alternatives to closure of Badcaul 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 The Highland Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The consultation ran from 26 August to 11 October 2024. A public meeting was held in Badcaul Church on 10 September 2024 and attended by 16 members of the public. Further to the mothballing of the school in January 2022, the council held an informal consultation about the future of the school with representatives from Lochbroom Community Council and local Parent Councils. Advance notice of the proposal was also circulated to parents of primary and pre-school children in the Badcaul area. It was agreed by all parties that the re-opening of the school was not realistic, given the lack of demand for primary education in the area. However, there was a plea by the local community for further mothballing for 12 months at which point a further review should take place.

2.3 There were 17 responses to the public consultation and almost all respondents were not in favour of the school closing permanently. Consultation with primary school children carried out by the council had a more mixed response, although the majority were in favour of closure.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The Highland Council believes that the educational benefits of closing Badcaul Primary School outweigh the benefits of it remaining mothballed. The three remaining children who attended Badcaul Primary School moved to Ullapool Primary School in January 2022, as a result of placing requests. The council suggest that the current children, and those that may attend in future, will have improved educational experiences by attending Ullapool Primary School in terms of collaborative learning and working with others. They believe that there are increased opportunities provided, such as artistic and sports activities. Additionally, the council notes that the provision of pre-school education at Ullapool Primary School is leading to a smoother transition for children moving into Primary 1. The availability of Gaelic Medium Education (GME) at Ullapool Primary School also provides additional choice for parents who want their children to learn Gaelic.

3.2 HM Inspectors agree with the council's reasons for the proposal to permanently close Badcaul Primary School. Numbers attending the school prior to mothballing were very small. At the time of mothballing, parents decided that Ullapool Primary School would provide a more rounded educational experience for their children. The provision of stronger transitions from pre-school to primary school and the availability of GME are also beneficial.

3.3 HM Inspectors visited Ullapool Primary School and Ullapool High School and had discussions with parents, staff and children. There were mixed views about the proposal. A few staff at Ullapool Primary School were not in favour, citing the impact of the loss of a small rural school in their communities. They feel that this may discourage new people from moving to the area. They also expressed concern about the lengthy bus journey to Ullapool for very young children, which they feel increases the length of the school day considerably. Overall, parents and children were mostly in favour of the proposal. Children attending Ullapool Primary School enjoy their learning and feel that they have a positive experience with lots of opportunities. However, they expressed sadness at the loss of a village school.

3.4 As the proposal, if implemented, 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 considered the alternatives to closing Badcaul Primary School permanently. They do not feel that continued mothballing is viable, in part due to the ongoing cost of maintaining the building. Based on school roll projections and other demographic data, the council do not believe there is a reasonable case for the school to re-open. They considered changing the catchment to another primary school, Baulnaluib. However, it has a declining roll which is projected to fall further. Although the catchment areas for both Badcaul and Baulnaluib are similar, any change would result in alteration to the secondary school catchments. The council decided it was not appropriate to alter secondary school catchments at this time. The council

understands the strength of feeling expressed at the public meeting and from the responses to the consultation. The loss of rural schools in communities is viewed by local people as adding to de-population in Highland Council. There is local interest in discussing the future of the school building and the council has agreed to engage in further discussions.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree with The Highland Council's proposal to permanently close Badcaul Primary School. It is clear that the children who have moved to Ullapool Primary School have settled well and are enjoying their learning. The lack of primary school age children in the Badcaul area means that the re-opening of the primary school is unlikely. Continued mothballing of the school building will incur additional costs for the council and ongoing uncertainty for local residents. However, the council should continue to engage with local people in Badcaul and the surrounding areas due to the strength of feeling about the loss of the school building.

**HM Inspectors
November 2024**