

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by HM Inspectors of Education addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Stirling Council to permanently discontinue education provision at Buchanan Primary School with effect from 24 June 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter; permanently change the catchment area so that pupils of Buchanan Primary School receive their education at Drymen Primary School, from 25 June 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter; and permanently extend the delineated catchment area of Drymen Primary School to include the delineated catchment area of Buchanan Primary School from 25 June 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter.

November 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by Her 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 Stirling Council's proposal to permanently discontinue education provision at Buchanan Primary School with effect from 24 June 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter; permanently change the catchment area so that pupils of Buchanan Primary School receive their education at Drymen Primary School, from 25 June 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter; and permanently extend the delineated catchment area of Drymen Primary School to include the delineated catchment area of Buchanan Primary School from 25 June 2022, or as soon as possible thereafter. 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 2010 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 schools; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children 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 virtual public meetings held on 19 October 2021 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
- a virtual visit to the site of Drymen Primary 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 Buchanan 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 Stirling Council undertook the consultation on its proposal(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The consultation period ran from 15 September 2021 until 10 November 2021. Prior to this, the council had engaged widely in pre-consultation activities. Notice of the consultation and the public meetings were advertised on Stirling Council's Engage web page. Information was regularly shared on Stirling Council's social media platforms. Posters were placed in the local area advertising the public meetings and subsequent drop-in session. The council held meetings with a range of stakeholder groups. Two virtual public meetings were held online on 19 October 2021. In total 19 members of the public attended these with a further four at the drop-in session. Most of the attendees were local residents. Fourteen written representations were received via the council's website, email and by letter. Almost all stakeholders agree with the council's rationale to permanently close Buchanan Primary School. More than a few residents had concerns about the future use of the school building should it close. Most local residents expressed a desire for the building to be developed and maintained as a community resource.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Buchanan Primary School was mothballed by Stirling Council in January 2018. During the period of mothballing, the catchment area of Drymen Primary School was extended to include the area covered by Buchanan Primary School and most children living in the Buchanan catchment area currently attend Drymen Primary School. Prior to mothballing, Buchanan Primary School operated as a single teacher primary school serving the village of Milton of Buchanan and the surrounding area. The capacity of Buchanan Primary School is 75 pupils. Prior to mothballing, the roll at Buchanan Primary School had fallen steadily over the past five school sessions. At the start of the 2017-18 session, there were five children enrolled at Buchanan Primary School. Between August and October 2017, placing requests for all five children were submitted and accepted for Drymen Primary School.

3.2 The council has set out a strong case in support of its proposal. There are a number of educational benefits for children and staff should the proposal go ahead. Children who spoke with HM Inspectors were positive about the proposal. They enjoy the many opportunities that are available in Drymen Primary School. Children who attend the school have access to a wider peer group. This provides increased opportunities to develop social skills and establish friendships. The availability and use of digital technology at Drymen Primary School, and the rich outdoor learning environment, engage and motivate children to learn. Children have opportunities to lead school improvement initiatives and participate in a range of clubs and activities. This promotes the development of their leadership skills and supports wider achievements.

3.3 Teaching staff at Drymen Primary School actively engage in professional learning and assume leadership roles in a variety of areas. This builds capacity within the staff team, supporting the delivery of a broad and rich curriculum resulting in a wide range of learning opportunities for children. Specialist support and assistance is available within the school, and this is of particular benefit to children with additional learning needs. Staff at Drymen Primary School build and utilise a range of effective partnerships, both within the local community and beyond, to support learning and teaching and contribute to school improvement. The active Parent Council and volunteers play an important role in facilitating activities such as extra-curricular clubs and fundraising events. This community involvement enhances the learning experiences of children at the school.

3.4 The relocation of Croftamie Nursery to Drymen Primary School will help to support smooth transition for children as they move from nursery to school. In addition, the shared campus offers

significant opportunities for staff and children from both establishments to work and improve together, building a strong community of learning.

3.5 Parents who spoke with HM Inspectors were positive about the proposal. They recognise the increased opportunities for children in terms of a wider circle of friends. They express positive views on the wide and rich opportunities children are experiencing at Drymen Primary School. They do not wish Buchanan Primary School to be re-opened. Once Croftamie Nursery is relocated to the same site, transporting children to the shared campus will be more convenient for families.

3.6 HM Inspectors agree with stakeholders and the council with regard to the educational benefits outlined above and in the proposal paper.

3.7 As the proposal will lead to the closure of an accessible 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 identified its reasons for formulating the proposal and considered reasonable alternatives to closure of the school before it consulted on this proposal. In terms of transport, the likely effect on the environment and on children will be very limited. Drymen Primary School is two and a half miles away from Buchanan Primary School. Transport to the school by mini-bus or private vehicle increases the journey time for most pupils by a maximum of ten minutes. Prior to mothballing, Buchanan Primary School building was only used for the purpose of educating primary school aged children during school hours. Public meetings, local events, fetes, surgeries and recreational activities are all held in the Memorial Hall at Milton of Buchanan. The local community are very interested in the future use of the mothballed school should the proposal go ahead. They are concerned that if left unattended the building could fall into disrepair. Local residents would like the building to remain as a community asset and have shared some suggestions with the council as to how the building could be used in the future.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that the proposal has strong educational benefits for children attending Drymen Primary School. Children are making wider friendships with the increased number of peers. There are greater opportunities to participate in teams, clubs and activities and to develop leadership skills. The broad and rich curriculum is being developed by a larger staff team with growing opportunities, for example, in languages and outdoor learning. Almost all children, staff and parents are positive about the proposal. Should the proposal go ahead and the school building be available for asset transfer, the council should work with stakeholders to explore how this might be used to the benefit of local residents.

**HM Inspectors
November 2021**