

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by HM Inspectors of Education addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council to discontinue education at Skipness Primary School and extend the current catchment area of Tarbert Primary School to include the current catchment of Skipness Primary School.

January 2022

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 Argyll and Bute Council's proposal to discontinue education at Skipness Primary School and extend the current catchment area of Tarbert Primary School to include the current catchment of Skipness 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 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 school; 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:

- 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 Tarbert Primary School and Tarbert Academy, 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 Skipness 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 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 took the decision to mothball Skipness Primary School in 2016 when the school roll dropped to zero. The school has remained mothballed since that time. A formal consultation process to consider the closure of the school was commenced under the terms of the 2010 Act in March 2020. Due to public health concerns and to follow national guidance, the consultation period was extended until December 2021. A public meeting was held in Skipness Village Hall on 10 November 2021 where eight members of the public attended. The attendees were overall in favour. Issues raised included the projected roll of the school, transport times for children and the future use of the school building should Skipness Primary School close. The council received three written responses which were supportive of the proposal. The council sought the views of children currently attending Tarbert Primary School. In total, 69 children were involved; 70% were in favour, 13% against and 17% were undecided.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 The council rightly points out the educational benefits with regard to a number of areas. These include, for example, transitions from the co-located Early Learning Centre into the primary classes at Tarbert Primary School. Joint planning for learning across the early level supports effective progression for children. Similarly, staff and children feel the transition between Tarbert Primary School and the secondary department in Tarbert Academy is easier for children moving within a larger group. HM Inspectors agree that in Tarbert Primary School, children benefit from the increased opportunities to build relationships with groups and individuals, develop social skills, meet challenges and exercise responsibilities as members of a wider social group. They are able to interact and socialise with different groups of children and take part in team activities. The children are able to maintain links with friends who live in their own village as well as creating links with children from other rural communities. Currently, due to current Covid restrictions, the clubs and activities are more limited. As restrictions ease, children will have access to a wider range of clubs and team activities including sports.

3.2 A number of benefits are possible as part of a significantly bigger school community. The larger staff group at Tarbert Primary School, provides opportunities for professional learning for staff including the moderation of children's work. The wider staff group are able to bring a range of talents and skills which benefits learners. Children in Tarbert Primary School are able to develop responsibility as members of class and the school councils. A buddy system encourages children from different stages to work and learn together. Young people from the Academy work with younger children as part of their sports leader roles. Children are able to perform and take on roles in the regular shows and concerts held in Tarbert Primary School and Academy.

3.3 Stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors agreed with the proposal. Whilst a few recognised some strengths in the experience children historically gained through their education in Skipness Primary School, stakeholders felt these were outweighed by the benefits children gained in Tarbert Primary School. These included the wider opportunities for clubs and team sports, learning with peers of a similar age and stage and greater social interaction allowing children to build friendships across a wider network.

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. The council has identified clearly its reasons for formulating the proposal. They considered carefully if there were any reasonable alternatives to closure of the school before it consulted on the proposal. To allow due consideration of the proposal, the council lengthened the time for the consultation and pushed back the date for implementation should the proposal go ahead. The level and nature of stakeholder response shows that, overall, the local community accept the council's proposal. The village of Skipness has its village hall for local use and members of the community have indicated their ideas for the possible future use of the school building should the proposal go ahead. The

likely effects of travelling arrangements on the environment and on children will be minimal as currently only one child lives in the existing Skipness catchment area. The travel time by car of 25 minutes is what has been well-established since the mothballing of Skipness Primary School in 2016 and this proposal will formalise this arrangement moving forward.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors' agree that the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council will result in educational benefits for the children in the Skipness Primary School catchment area. The proposal provides clarity for parents and the community with regard to the future education provision in the area. There are clear benefits to children both socially and educationally. Children will be working with a larger peer group, closely aligned to their age and stage. There will be more opportunities for after school activities and teamwork. Should the proposal go ahead, the wider opportunities in Tarbert Primary School, broader range of activities and larger group of peers will continue to provide valuable experiences for the children in the Skipness catchment area. The current and predicted number of children within the catchment area is insufficient to make the school viable. The proposal will assist the council to deliver 'Best Value' through making more efficient and effective use of its resources. In taking forward the proposal the council should follow up on working with the Skipness community to explore options for the future use of the mothballed school.

HM Inspectors
January 2022