

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Stirling Council to permanently close Crianlarich Nursery School.

May 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 Stirling Council to permanently close Crianlarich Nursery 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 setting; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper;
- 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 16 April 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 Killin Nursery School and Crianlarich Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 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 any reasonable alternatives to closure of Crianlarich Nursery 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 4 March to 1 May 2024 with copies of the consultation available online and made available to relevant stakeholders. A survey, on the council's website, generated 19 responses. Eleven people attended the public meeting held on 16 April 2024 at Crianlarich Primary School. In the absence of a community council, information about the proposal was sent to Strathfillan Community Development Trust. Due to the age of the children affected, the council did not meet with children as part of this consultation. Most of the survey respondents do not agree with the proposal. Concerns were raised with regards to a lack of public transport, distance to the nearest nursery, the impact on working families and on attracting families to the area. Similar concerns were raised at the public meeting. At the meeting, the council responded to questions about future capacity of Killin Nursery and the recruitment issues for Crianlarich Nursery. The council confirmed there was sufficient capacity at Killin Nursery and that they are working with stakeholders to establish childminder services.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits of the proposal. The roll of Crianlarich Nursery has dropped significantly over the last few years and is now at three. Currently, Crianlarich Nursery School offers sessions during term time. If approved, there is a potential benefit for families to access the longer hours and year-round provision at Killin Nursery School. Killin Nursery School provides a suitable learning environment and currently has the capacity to meet the needs of children from Crianlarich. Children also benefit from building relationships with a larger group of their peers. If the proposal is approved, children from Crianlarich will not experience any disruption as they already attend Killin Nursery School. The proposal has the potential to address recruitment issues identified for Crianlarich Nursery School. Recruitment has been difficult, with some posts re-advertised. Due to the shortage of staff, the council currently provides a taxi for children from Crianlarich. If the proposal goes ahead, support with transport to nursery will be offered to those who meet the eligibility criteria for nursery transport. There are significant concerns, across all stakeholders, that a lack of transport will prevent children from accessing nursery provision. The council should continue to engage with parents to consider ways to address these concerns. This will help to ensure that children are able to access an important aspect of their education.

3.2 Crianlarich Nursery School is under the headship of Killin Primary School alongside Killin Nursery School and Crianlarich Primary School. Staff who met with inspectors understand the positives and negatives of the council's proposal. The nursery staff value being one team in a single space, which improves team working and communication. Staff agree that children from Crianlarich, benefit from attending Killin Nursery School. The children have more opportunity to develop their social skills alongside a larger group of children of their own age. Staff are successfully meeting children's developmental and learning needs and transition from school to nursery is supported well. A few staff noted that transitions were more flexible when Crianlarich Nursery School was open and there was a greater connection with parents. Staff are concerned that, if transport is withdrawn, some children may not attend nursery, potentially missing out on learning. If Crianlarich Nursery School were to stay open, staff think that it would be difficult to manage cover across the two sites of Killin and Crianlarich.

3.3 Most children who engaged with HM Inspectors previously attended Crianlarich Nursery School, where they enjoyed their experience. Children at Crianlarich Primary School, think that a small nursery close to home, with a few children, is better than a larger nursery further away, with more children of the same age.

3.4 Parents, who met with HM Inspectors, agree that the Killin Nursery School is providing an appropriate environment where their children are learning and developing. Whilst they value the friendships that their children are making, they are concerned that they will lose these important

connections when they move to Crianlarich Primary School. Parents' main concern is a lack of transport if they do not meet the criteria. They point out that not every family has access to a car and there is currently no suitable public transport. Parents also think that the travel time between Crianlarich and Killin is a barrier for them. It is not compatible with their work commitments or with picking up and dropping off older siblings. They would like to see the nursery at Crianlarich remain as an option.

3.5 HM Inspectors also engaged with Strathfillan Community Development Trust. Whilst they understand the benefits for children attending Killin Nursery School, they do not wish Crianlarich Nursery School to permanently close. They think that any reduction in resources in the village makes it a less attractive place to live. A proposal for new housing at Tyndrum, if approved, could bring more families to the area. The trust has not yet considered alternative uses for the nursery school building which could benefit the community. They would like the council to consider mothballing the nursery, with the hope that more families will move to the area in the near future.

3.6 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. A pre-consultation with families and stakeholders was undertaken by the council to explore options for the nursery. The council has clearly explained its reasons for formulating the proposal, which include the low number of children in the area likely to attend, issues with recruiting staff for the nursery and the suitability of the provision at Killin Nursery School. The council considered mothballing the provision, however they state as there is no guarantee of recruiting staff or any anticipated increase in the roll, this is not a preferred option. If the nursery were to remain open, current staff shortages mean that provision would still need to be at Killin Nursery School. The council would continue to incur a financial loss. Consideration was given to joining Crianlarich Nursery School with Crianlarich Primary School. The council states that the physical environment of the primary school is not suitable to support this. The council further states that they are working with the Scottish Childminding Association to promote recruitment of childminders in the area. It is hoped that this could offer alternative options for local families. Transport to Killin Nursery School is currently provided for children living in Crianlarich. The council will stop this provision in August 2025, if the proposal is approved. Stirling Council will continue to provide transport for children who meet their eligibility criteria.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits of this proposal. The provision available at Killin Nursery School is currently meeting the needs of children from Crianlarich. There is capacity for this to continue in the future, based on current roll predictions. Staff at Killin Nursery School work well together as one team. Most stakeholders understand the educational benefits of the proposal for children. However, they continue to be concerned that a lack of transport could prevent some children from accessing nursery provision in the future. They are also concerned that closing the nursery could have a negative impact on the community of Crianlarich. In taking this proposal forward, the council should continue to engage with stakeholders to address these concerns.

HM Inspectors
May 2024