

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council to realign the catchment areas for Achahoish Primary School and Tarbert Academy Primary School.

1. Introduction

This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments contained in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of Argyll and Bute Council's proposal to realign the catchment areas for Achahoish Primary School and Tarbert Academy 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 a copy of 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 legislative 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.

1.1 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the schools, 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.

1.2 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 8 December 2015 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 sites of Achahoish Primary School and Tarbert Academy Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Argyll and Bute Council undertook the consultation on its proposal with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010* and the amendments in the *Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014*.

2.2 The consultation ran from 4 November 2015 until 18 December 2015. The council posted the proposal document on its website and lodged copies in the schools concerned, in council offices and in all libraries in Mid Argyll. In addition the council placed an advert in local newspapers. The council held public meetings on 1 and 8 December 2015 at Achahoish Primary School and Tarbert Academy respectively. The council received 31 responses during the consultation period and almost all were in agreement with the proposal. The council also held meetings for staff and children at both the schools concerned.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Argyll and Bute Council has set out an appropriate rationale for its proposal to realign the catchment areas for Achahoish Primary School and Tarbert Academy Primary School, to be implemented from August 2016. Within the current catchment arrangements, a proportion of children who live closer to Achahoish Primary School are zoned for Tarbert Academy Primary School. This results in parents submitting placing requests for their child to attend the school nearer their home. Some children who live in the proposed catchment area attend Achahoish Primary School on placing requests. The current roll in Achahoish Primary School is ten pupils. Parents who live in the proposed rezoned catchment area and who enrol children from January 2016 will have the choice of sending their child to Achahoish Primary School or Tarbert Academy Primary School. Until August 2022, siblings of children who live in the proposed rezoned catchment area and attend Tarbert Academy Primary School will have the option of attending Tarbert Academy Primary School without the need for a placing request. The proposal will not affect the existing arrangements for pupils going to secondary school.

3.2 Achahoish Primary School was built in November 2005 and is located within the Knapdale National Scenic Area at the lochside. The school curriculum relates directly to the rural context of where the children live, reflecting their immediate outdoor environment in settings such as the beach classroom.

3.3 From the proposed catchment boundary the distance to Achahoish Primary School is 9.6 miles. The distance to Tarbert Academy Primary School is 13.7 miles. All travel in this area is on a single track road with passing places, which greatly lengthens travel times. Children are therefore in transit for a significant part of their school day. Shortening travel times would enable children to arrive at school less tired and more ready to learn. It would also increase access to after school learning opportunities.

3.4 Members of the Achahoish Primary School community, including children who spoke to HM Inspectors were very positive about the proposal and felt that the council had ensured that they were well-informed. They had reached a view that the proposal would benefit the school community by strengthening links between children and families from naturally neighbouring communities in an isolated rural area. Staff stated that the boundary change would strengthen the diversity and vibrancy of the school community. Children were enthusiastic about having more friends. The parental view was that the larger catchment area would shorten journeys to and from school and lead to more children on the roll. Children who live in Kilberry and are in the proposed catchment area would be able to attend the same primary school as those in the neighbouring community.

3.5 Members of the Tarbert Academy Primary School community who spoke to HM Inspectors were in favour of the proposal. Due to the distance between schools, and the very small number of children involved in this proposal, they believed there will be no direct effect on the Tarbert Community.

3.6 The South Knapdale Community Council, members of the local community and local employers who responded in writing, strongly support the proposal which they believe encourages and supports settlement and retention of young families in a fragile rural community.

3.7 Currently parents/carers drive children to the existing catchment boundary where the children then board a bus. However the proposal will have significant financial implications, involving either the extension of the current bus route, or the purchase of a minibus and employment of a driver. Parents and the local community have proposed that parental mileage be paid as an alternative. Argyll and Bute Council currently pay parental mileage payments to some families, including families in Achahoish. This would be a cost effective option and Argyll and Bute Council should give this proposition due consideration.

4. Summary

Argyll and Bute Council's proposal has potential educational benefits for existing children and those who may attend Achahoish Primary School in the future. It will ensure that children have opportunities to benefit from learning in their local environment. The decrease in travel time to and from school will support children's concentration and readiness to learn. The proposal will have no impact on children who attend Tarbert Academy Primary School.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
January 2016**