

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council to discontinue education provision at Ardchattan Primary School and to extend the catchment area of Lochnell Primary School to include the current catchment area of Ardchattan Primary School.

June 2019

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 provision at Ardchattan Primary School and to extend the catchment area of Lochnell Primary School to include the current catchment area of Ardchattan Primary School. Changes to be effective from 21 October 2019. 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 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; any other users; 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 public meeting held on 2 May 2019 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 Dunbeg Primary School, Lochnell Primary School and Ardchattan 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 Ardchattan 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(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The formal consultation ran from 18 March 2019 until 17 May 2019. The council posted the consultation document on its website. A summary of the proposal document was provided to key stakeholders. Copies of the proposal document were also made available at local council offices, public libraries and the schools affected by the proposal. The council also made arrangements to gather children's views at Lochnell Primary School about the proposal. All the children were supportive of the proposal. They identified key benefits as having access to more children for friendships and more teachers. A public meeting on 2 May 2019 was attended by three representatives of the local community. All present were supportive of the proposal on the basis that the vacant building be considered for community use. The council received three written responses. Of these two were in favour of the proposal and one was inconclusive. However, all three responses indicated support for the possibility of a future transfer of the vacant building to community use should the proposal proceed.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Ardchattan Primary School was built in 1886 and is located approximately 12 miles north of Oban. The catchment area extends along the northern shore of Loch Etive including the village of Bonawe. The school is co-educational and non-denominational. It has been mothballed for five years. The school roll is very low and is not predicted to rise in the near future. The annual cost of mothballing the school is £2,147. Since being mothballed, the building condition has deteriorated. There have been no pupil enrolments since elected members approved the mothballing. In 2018-19, there were eight children living in the Ardchattan Primary School catchment area attending Dunbeg Primary School and Lochnell Primary School. Argyll and Bute is facing increasing challenges in recruiting staff. This proposal will bring educational benefits and assist in ensuring that the education budget is more sustainable in the future. Lochnell Primary School is a suitably equipped and well supported school situated in the village of Benderloch. The school is well maintained and has an all-weather pitch adjacent to the school which is well used. The building has facilities for pupils and visitors with special access needs. Both Lochnell Primary School and Dunbeg Primary School have nursery provision.

3.2 The council has set out a reasonable case in support of its proposal. The council states there will be a number of educational benefits for children if the proposal goes ahead. These include improved social interaction opportunities among children of their own age. This will also help children develop important mental, social, physical and emotional skills. Larger year groups will increase the opportunity for collaborative working with children of a similar age and stage of development. Opportunities to engage in a wider range of activities which enrich the curriculum will be increased. The proposal will assist the council to make efficient and effective use of its resources as it will not incur the costs of maintaining a mothballed building.

3.3 Children, parents and staff from Lochnell Primary School and Dunbeg Primary School who met with HM Inspectors were supportive of the proposal. Children from Lochnell Primary School enjoy having access to a wider range of learning opportunities and friendship groups from attending a bigger school. Opportunities to take on positions of responsibility within the school were increased. Whilst the children were supportive of the proposed closure they were equally clear they want the vacant school to be made available as a community resource. Ardchattan parents spoke positively of the benefits of their children attending a larger school. They recognise future numbers required to reopen Ardchattan Primary School are not viable. Staff recognise the benefits attending a larger school brings to the children, in supporting the demands of Curriculum

for Excellence in areas such as health and wellbeing. Delivering employability and personal and social skills was seen as being difficult in a very small school setting.

3.4 Members of the community who met with HM Inspectors were very positive about the proposal. They recognised the benefits to children from attending a larger school. They also identified the potential of the vacant Ardchattan Primary School to act as a community hub which would be of clear social benefit to people of all ages locally. Local constituted groups such as Ardchattan Community Centre were already making good use of the vacant property by running events such as a monthly 'pop up' tea room and art classes. Local survey information identifies strong support. Plans for further development are in place, subject to the outcome of the consultation.

3.5 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. In arriving at its proposal the council has clearly assessed the likely benefits to children and in doing so has given consideration to any reasonable alternatives. A number of options were considered. These included the continued mothballing of Ardchattan Primary School, the re-opening of Ardchattan Primary School either as a school (with the catchment area of Lochnell Primary School realigned) or as a resource centre for children with additional support needs. Due to insufficient demand these were not seen as viable. The current proposal to discontinue education provision at Ardchattan Primary School and to extend the catchment area of Lochnell Primary School to include the current catchment area of Ardchattan Primary School was the option most favoured by the local community and the council. The very small numbers of children anticipated in Ardchattan in the future are likely to limit opportunities for children to develop a broad range of skills. The proposal does not impact negatively on children and young people at Lochnell Primary School or on the Ardchattan community. Since the school was 'mothballed' in 2014 local community groups such as 'Ardchattan Community Centre' have made regular use of the vacant building running well-supported community events. The council has indicated a willingness to consider a request to transfer the ownership of the vacant building as part of a local asset transfer. Equality and socio economic impact assessments conducted by the council identify no negative impact. There is scope to develop Ardchattan Primary School as a community venue. Lochnell Primary School is 9.8 miles from Ardchattan Primary School. Travel time is approximately 20 minutes. The current travel arrangements for children have been in place for almost four years. Travel is an accepted aspect of living in the Bonawe community.

4. Summary

Argyll and Bute Council's proposal to discontinue education provision at Ardchattan Primary School and to extend the catchment area of Lochnell Primary School to include the current catchment area of Ardchattan Primary School has clear educational benefits for current and future pupils of Ardchattan Primary School and the local community. It has very strong support from stakeholders. Children will have access to increased learning opportunities, wider experiences and better socialisation through being part of a larger school. Ardchattan Primary School has not been in use since being mothballed in 2014. The current 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 its expressed interest in working with the Ardchattan community to develop a sustainable community facility via a possible community asset transfer.

HM Inspectors
June 2019