

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council to close Ashfield Primary School and permanently extend the Tayvallich Primary School delineated catchment area to subsume the whole delineated catchment area of Ashfield 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 close Ashfield Primary School and permanently extend the Tayvallich Primary School delineated catchment area to subsume the whole delineated catchment area of Ashfield 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 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 8 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 Tayvallich Primary School and Ashfield 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 Ashfield 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 The mothballing of Ashfield Primary School was approved by the Community Services Committee of Argyll and Bute Council on 10 March 2016, following a progressive drop in its roll and lack of success in appointing staff to teacher or headteacher posts. There have been no pupils attending the school since December 2014 and none have been enrolled since the mothballing was approved. The potential school roll is low and it is not predicted to rise in the near future. The majority of catchment children have been attending Tayvallich Primary School since 2016. The consultation relating to the proposal for closure ran from 18 March to 17 May 2019. The council placed an advert in the local press and sent a letter to all relevant consultees. Information was placed on the council website, along with an electronic means of responding to the consultation. Responses were also invited by letter, written response form or email. A small group of pupils who would previously have attended Ashfield Primary School were consulted on 26 April 2019. A public meeting was held in Ashfield Primary School on 8 May 2019, which was attended by council staff and three members of the public. There were four written responses to the consultation from members of the local community, each of which requested an extension to the mothballing of the school so that community use of the building could be explored. There were also responses from North Knapdale Community Council and Achnamara Village Hall Committee.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Tayvallich Primary School is a well-supported school at the heart of its community which has had substantial investment in recent years, including upgrading the early learning provision and extending primary provision. Children benefit from access to a range of community facilities near the school and from the use of local woodland areas for outdoor learning. The school offers a learning environment which encourages achievement and provides a good range of opportunities for children to achieve their full potential and to develop their independence, confidence and enterprising attitude.

3.2 Children who would previously have attended Ashfield Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors enjoy coming to Tayvallich Primary School and being with their friends. None of them would be keen to see Ashfield Primary School reopened.

3.3 Parents of children who would previously have attended Ashfield Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors understand the circumstances which led to the mothballing of the school and accept that this was the most appropriate course of action for the council. They agree with the proposal to close the school.

3.4 Staff at Tayvallich Primary School who spoke to HM Inspectors agree with the proposal. They think that children who would previously have been educated at Ashfield Primary School have benefited from being part of a larger school and developing their social skills.

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.

3.6 The council considered four options, including the proposal: reopening Ashfield Primary School; continued mothballing of Ashfield Primary School; reopening Ashfield Primary School with the catchment area realigned to Tayvallich Primary School; closing Ashfield Primary School and realigning its catchment area to Tayvallich Primary School. The council held community engagement meetings in March and April 2018 to consider each of these options. As a result of

these meetings, the council concluded that the most appropriate option would be the last of these. Whilst accepting that the permanent closure of the school could have an adverse effect on the local community, the potential use of the school building as a community facility could have a positive impact on the sustainability of the village. The travel time from Ashfield Primary School to either Tayvallich Primary School or Lochgilphead Primary School is approximately 20 minutes. These travel arrangements have been in place for two years and have had no adverse effect on learners.

4. Summary

Argyll and Bute Council's proposal to close Ashfield Primary School and permanently extend the Tayvallich Primary School delineated catchment area to subsume the whole delineated catchment area of Ashfield Primary School has clear educational benefits which are currently being experienced by children. Parents, children and staff are agreed about the educational benefits of the proposal. In taking the proposal forward, the council needs to continue to engage with all stakeholders and ensure that the local community is supported in exploring options for alternative use of the Ashfield Primary School building.

**HM Inspectors
June 2019**