HMIE | His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education in Scotland
Luchd-sgrùdaidh an Rìgh airson Foghlam ann an Alba

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by HMIE addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Argyll and Bute Council to relocate the Tobermory 2-18 Campus.

November 2026

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from HMIE 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 Argyll and Bute Council to relocate the Tobermory 2-18 Campus. 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.

1.2 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.

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

- attendance at the public meeting held on 17 September 2026 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;
- consideration of further representations made directly to HMIE on relevant educational aspects of the proposal; and
- visits to the sites of Bunessan Primary School (PS), Dervaig PS, Lochdonhead PS, Oban High School, Salen PS, Tobermory 2-18 Campus and Ulva PS 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.

2.2 A previous consultation concerning a 2-18 campus on Mull in 2022 involved islanders, including those from the Ross of Mull and Iona. The current statutory consultation does not include those who live out with the Tobermory 2-18 Campus catchment area. The statutory consultation ran from 24 August to 2 October 2026. The council published the proposal paper on its website and made copies available to

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stakeholders and in various council buildings. The council held a public meeting on 17 September 2026. Attendees asked a range of questions to gather more detail about the proposal. These included the accessibility and suitability of the site, and building design. Attendees raised queries about education provision for children and young people with additional support needs. They also asked whether the proposal represents the best long-term solution for children and young people across the island of Mull.

2.3 The council received 262 online survey responses, including 22 duplicates. Six respondents submitted more than one response. A further 24 responses were received after the statutory consultation closed. Of the valid responses, 70 supported the proposal and 165 opposed it. Supporters felt the catchment outlined in the proposal would benefit a large proportion of Mull's population and reflected the current location in Tobermory. Some respondents highlighted the need to develop active travel routes to the school, which would require further assessment. Respondents, both for and against the proposal, raised concerns about the size and suitability of the proposed site, particularly whether it would provide enough classroom space and capacity for future growth. Those opposed argued that the proposal does not adequately meet the needs of all families on the island, particularly young people who need to stay away from home during the school week. A few respondents highlighted the right to a family life under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Concerns were also raised on behalf of pupils from the Ross of Mull and southern areas of the island who attend secondary school in Oban, where ferry disruptions can affect access to in-person education. Iona residents raised concerns regarding Iona-Fionnphort ferry disruptions, should they be required to attend a school on Mull. Respondents who favour an alternative Craignure location suggested it would allow all young people on Mull to attend the same secondary school while supporting the island's cultural, social and economic development. They expressed its proximity to the ferry terminal could improve access for sports, educational excursions and activities, and make travel easier for specialist teachers.

2.4 Argyll and Bute Council officers supported age-appropriate engagement with children and young people from Lochdonhead PS, Dervaig PS, Salen PS, Ulva PS, Tobermory PS and Tobermory Secondary School to gather their views. Children and young people said what they would like to see in a new school. They also offered suggestions about the potential location, with support for both Tobermory or a more central campus on Mull.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 HM Inspectors agree that there are potential educational benefits stated in the council's proposal. The council recognises the limitations of the current accommodation at Tobermory 2-18 Campus. The council proposes to build a new single site campus to the southern edge of Tobermory. HM Inspectors agree that the current school building is in need of replacement or significant refurbishment. A purpose-built campus has the potential to provide modern facilities, which could enhance children's and young people's engagement, wellbeing and attainment and achievement. However, the council could provide more specific information about the proposed new school and the chosen site. This includes how the council will make effective and efficient use of its resources to continue to secure educational benefits for all children and young people.

3.2 HM Inspectors met with a range of stakeholders including children, young people, parents, carers, staff and community members. All stakeholders agreed that there was a need for significant investment and replacement of much of the Tobermory campus. However, most stakeholders raised concerns about the proposed location and the single site. They do not believe that the current proposal represents the most appropriate long-term solution for children and young people on Mull. Most young people, parents and carers and a few staff who met with HM Inspectors believe that the council should consider an alternative split site, with Tobermory retaining early learning and childcare and primary provision, and the

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secondary school being relocated to a more central part of the island. Most parents and carers who met with HM Inspectors want the council to use the opportunity for a new school to end the practice of young people being separated from their families for education. They believe this would create greater equity and better suit the needs of more families across Mull.

3.3 Almost all stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors agree there are potential benefits that could come from a new school building and facilities. Children and young people identified features they would like to be included such as a library, digital technology, sports facilities, outdoor learning areas and age-appropriate spaces. A few stakeholders expressed support for locating the campus wholly in Tobermory. However, most expressed concern about the size and suitability of the proposed site. The proposed development may reduce teaching, specialist, social, sports and outdoor facilities when compared with the existing provision and may not allow for growth if the school roll increases. Stakeholders believe the council could provide further detail on educational benefits of the proposal including teaching spaces, outdoor learning provision and future capacity. A few questioned whether the pre-school provision could remain in-situ. In its consultation report, the council should more fully demonstrate how the education benefits in the proposal will be achieved to address the concerns raised.

3.4 Most parents, carers and staff who met with HM Inspectors expressed concern about traffic management on the chosen site, including the lack of parking and suitable drop-off and pick-up areas. They are concerned about the volume of traffic and would like more clarification on changes to roads, walkways and cycling paths that will support safe routes to school. A few parents, carers and staff raised questions about transport arrangements, including the use of public transport. A few stakeholders who live in the south area of the island, but within the Tobermory catchment, told HM Inspectors that travel times to and from the proposed site would be too long for children and young people.

3.5 The majority of stakeholders who met with HM Inspectors expressed the importance of access to out of school activities. Children and young people described the social benefits of mixing with their peers in other recreational activities and whole island events. Parents and young people in the Oban catchment said that, although they could access these opportunities throughout the week, young people can be restricted from joining clubs that meet during the weekend. As a result, they have less opportunity to participate in clubs and team activities to progress their chosen interest, such as music and sport. Although this is out with the scope of this statutory consultation, the council may wish to consider introducing or extending whole island approaches to increase access.

3.6 A majority of parents and carers who met with HM Inspectors reported their lack of trust in the council's consultation process. They do not feel that the council has adequately considered their views or been fully transparent with them. They expressed disappointment that the proposal is different from what they expected when it was first discussed in 2022. They would like the council to give further consideration to alternative models, including a secondary school for the whole island. Children in the Bunessan PS catchment expressed their excitement about the possibility of a new secondary school, which could mean they did not need to leave home during the week to receive their secondary education. All parents and a few young people from the Ross of Mull, in the Bunessan PS catchment, who met with HM Inspectors, questioned whether the council had considered fully the views of children and young people in relation to its duties under the UNCRC. A significant majority of parents and carers do not agree that the council should implement the current proposal. The council may wish to consider how it works with these families to address their concerns.

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4. Summary

HM Inspectors acknowledge the clear educational rationale for replacing the ageing Tobermory 2-18 Campus. HM Inspectors agree that a new purpose-built campus has the potential to improve learning environments, wellbeing, attainment and achievement and provide educational benefits. However, most stakeholders expressed concerns about the proposed Tobermory location and the single site model. Most stakeholders favoured further consideration of alternative options, including a more centrally located secondary school to improve equity of access across Mull. This alternative option could reduce the need for young people from the south of the island to live away from home during the school week to attend a secondary school in Oban. Whilst there was broad support for investment in new facilities, stakeholders sought greater clarity regarding the chosen site, educational benefits, future capacity, transport arrangements and traffic management. The majority of parents and carers who met with HM Inspectors expressed concerns about the council's consultation process and felt their views had not been fully considered. In preparing its consultation report, the council should provide more detailed information on how the proposal would deliver its intended educational benefits and give further consideration to the concerns and alternative options put forward by stakeholders.

HM Inspectors
November 2026

On behalf of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland

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