

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Dumfries and Galloway Council to close Drochduil Primary School and to realign its primary catchment with its partnership school Castle Kennedy Primary School.

1. Introduction

1.1 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 Dumfries and Galloway Council's proposal to close Drochduil Primary School and to realign its primary catchment with its partnership school, Castle Kennedy 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.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of the school; 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 meetings held on 1 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 site of Drochduil Primary School and Castle Kennedy 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 Drochduil 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 Dumfries and Galloway 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 Dumfries and Galloway Council's consultation on the proposal to close Drochduil Primary School and realign its catchment area to Castle Kennedy Primary School ran from 1 December 2015 to 26 January 2016. Public meetings were held on 1 December 2015 at both Castle Kennedy Primary School and Drochduil Primary School. No members of the public attended the Castle Kennedy Primary School public meeting. One member of staff, four parents, three parents of former pupils, five members of 'The Friends of Drochduil Primary School' and three pupils attended the Drochduil Primary School meeting. Of those who attended the Drochduil Primary School public meeting almost all felt that the continuation of Drochduil Primary School was not sustainable given its declining roll year-on-year. A public meeting was also held at Glenluce Primary School on 1 December 2015 with no attendees. An officer was also in attendance at the mobile library bus at Dunragit on 2 December 2016 and there were no attendees.

2.3 The council consulted with a wide range and appropriate number of stakeholders. Almost all stakeholders felt that the proposal had sound educational benefits and were supportive of the proposal. Information about the proposal was disseminated widely in schools, in the local press, the council's website and was shared with 'The Friends of Drochduil Community Group' and the local Community Council.

2.4 The website had 27 viewings and no written responses. An impact assessment was also undertaken to consider the impact of closing a school with less than ten children.

3. Educational Aspects of Proposal

3.1 Drochduil Primary School currently has three pupils. The roll of the school has been declining year-on-year and it is expected that this trend will continue. By 2020/21 the maximum number of pupils is predicted to be ten, but only if all the current pre-school aged children choose to attend Drochduil Primary School. The school building is physically separate from any settlement and children from Dunragit who attend the school have to cross the A75 and a railway line to reach the school.

As a result of the declining roll and parents' preference to send their children to alternative local schools, the council is proposing to close Drochduil Primary School and realign its catchment area so that, from August 2016, children will instead attend Castle Kennedy Primary School. Castle Kennedy Primary School has the capacity to accommodate the pupils who are currently zoned for Drochduil Primary School. If the proposal goes ahead in August 2016, Castle Kennedy Primary School would have a roll of 47, comprising two multi-composite classes.

3.2 There are clear educational benefits for the pupils in Drochduil Primary School. The pupils would have a larger peer group with whom to socialise and develop their interpersonal skills. They would also be able to participate in team games, and enjoy break times with a larger peer group. Their learning would also be enhanced by being able to work in small groups and benefit from collaborative learning with their peers.

3.3 Drochduil Primary School and Castle Kennedy Primary School are part of the same cluster and as such have the same headteacher. This allows for consistency of leadership, vision and values. Currently, pupils from Drochduil Primary School attend Castle Kennedy Primary School for more than 50% of their curriculum. This has helped them to benefit from the educational benefits outlined above. The pupils of Drochduil Primary School would therefore continue to benefit from the cluster leadership without having to use time to travel to and from the two schools and thereby using potential teaching and learning time.

3.4 Almost all parents, pupils, staff and other stakeholders of Drochduil Primary School who met with HM Inspectors feel that the proposal will have educational benefits for current and future pupils. Pupils reported that they like to spend time in Castle Kennedy Primary School because there are more children to play and learn with. They also appreciate that, when they reach P7, they will have a peer group when they transfer to Stranraer Academy, potentially providing them with a smoother transition.

3.5 Parents, staff and pupils in Castle Kennedy Primary School who met with HM Inspectors were also very supportive of the proposal. The children from Drochduil Primary School are already receiving a large amount of their education in Castle Kennedy Primary School and they see the proposal as a natural development from this position. Parents and teachers of Castle Kennedy Primary School are concerned that if Drochduil Primary School closes, then they will no longer be able to offer three multi-composite classes and will need to return to two. If the proposal goes ahead they have asked that the education authority gives consideration to providing additional staffing during the transition phase to allow Castle Kennedy Primary School to continue to provide three multi-composite classes rather than two.

3.6 The council also gave appropriate consideration to the value added from the proposal for future children as a result of managing its estate more efficiently.

3.7 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.

- The council carried out an extensive impact assessment to determine the effects, if any, of their proposal. The assessment determined that there were no significant impacts which would result from the closure. HM inspectors were of a similar view.
- The school is not used significantly by the community other than for school fundraising events. The building is physically isolated from any natural community, and stakeholders interviewed by HM Inspectors agreed that it did not form a crucial community role.
- Alternative proposals were also considered. For example, consideration was given by the council to extending the catchment area of the school to make it more viable. However, this would potentially have a detrimental impact on neighbouring Castle Kennedy and Glenluce Primary Schools. The council also considered mothballing the school because of the declining roll. However, this would have impacted negatively on the redeployment of staff given current council policies, and children would not be able to access free travel to other schools.
- The council also looked at travel arrangements and the possible impact on the environment. Given that all staff and children currently travel by car or bus and that walking or cycling are not viable alternatives, they concluded that the proposal would not impact significantly on the environment.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors believe that the proposal offers significant educational benefits for children currently attending Drochduil Primary School and for those who would attend in the future. The declining roll of Drochduil Primary School makes it increasingly challenging to meet children's social/emotional and learning needs within the school. The partnership with Castle Kennedy Primary School is helping to address some of these needs by providing increased interaction with a broader range of peers and opportunities to widen and deepen children's thinking through collaborative working. These advantages would be enhanced further if they were able to attend Castle Kennedy Primary School on a full-time basis. The proposal will also help Dumfries and Galloway Council to secure best value by making efficient and effective use of its school estate.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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