

Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010

Report by HMIE addressing educational aspects of the proposal by Dumfries and Galloway Council to discontinue education provision at Palnackie Primary School, which is currently mothballed.

November 2025

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland 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 Dumfries and Galloway Council to discontinue education provision at Palnackie Primary School, which is currently mothballed. 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. Where a council is proposing to close a school, there are specific additional obligations. These include notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers. There are special provisions that apply 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 24 September 2025 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 Dalbeattie High School and Dalbeattie Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 As the proposal, if implemented, 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 Palnackie 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(s) with reference to the [Schools \(Consultation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2010](#).

2.2 The consultation ran from 3 September to 29 October 2025. The council published the proposal paper on its website and made copies available through various council offices, and in the village shop. The council undertook pre-consultation and engagement activity with the local community and outlined three options before it considered closure. Option A - Re-open Palnackie Primary School. Option B - Mothball Palnackie Primary School with the temporary catchment of Dalbeattie Primary School. Option C - Find an alternative use for the building (closure of the school with the catchment realigned to Dalbeattie Primary School). Following the pre-consultation survey, most (79%) of respondents supported Option C.

2.3 The council received six responses to the public consultation. Almost all agreed with the council's proposal to close Palnackie Primary School and realign the catchment area with Dalbeattie Primary School. A public meeting was held on 24 September 2025 in Palnackie Village Hall, which was attended by 12 members of the public. Stakeholders queried the future use of the building if the school closes and the timescales for community asset transfer requests.

2.4 The council consulted children from Dalbeattie Primary School, including those from the Palnackie Primary School catchment area. Children expressed positive views of being part of both small and larger schools. They would like the council to consider the future use of the school building.

3. Educational aspects of proposal

3.1 Palnackie Primary School is a remote rural school and was mothballed in June 2025 following the school roll falling to three children for August 2025. This reflects school rolls reducing across Dumfries and Galloway. Palnackie Primary School roll is not predicted to rise significantly in the coming years.

3.2 In its proposal, the council sets out a comprehensive educational benefits statement in relation to learning and teaching, educational outcomes, experiences and opportunities, and the learning environment. It states that children from will benefit from a curriculum design that supports their rural location and the skills and attributes needed to meet their individual needs and rural context. Children from Palnackie Primary School catchment area are settled in Dalbeattie Primary School and are developing skills through participation in a wider range of committees and involvement in project-based learning. HM Inspectors agree that there are education benefits to this proposal.

3.3 HM Inspectors visited Dalbeattie Primary School and Dalbeattie High School and had discussions with children, young people, parents and staff. Children and young people who met with HM Inspectors were able to express their views on the advantages and disadvantages of attending a small rural school setting. Those attending Palnackie Primary School enjoyed the opportunity to walk or cycle to school. However, they feel that the additional travel to Dalbeattie Primary School does not negatively impact upon them.

3.4 All children, young people, parents and staff that met with HM Inspectors agree with the council's proposal to close Palnackie Primary School. They recognise that numbers attending the school prior to mothballing were very low and that Dalbeattie Primary School provides a positive educational experience. Those children who previously attended Palnackie Primary School recognise that since moving school they have gained more interpersonal skills and friendships. All of the children said that they are happy in their current school and benefit from being part of a larger school.

3.5 All children, young people, staff and parents that met with HM Inspectors expressed sadness that Palnackie Primary School may close, but they support the council's proposal. They are keen that the 200-year history is not lost.

3.6 As the proposal, if implemented, 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. At the pre-consultation stage the council considered two reasonable alternatives to the current proposal, to re-open Palnackie Primary School or the continued mothballing of Palnackie Primary School with the temporary catchment to Dalbeattie Primary School. The council considered a range of factors including the education benefits, community impact and travel implications for each option. The council confirm that transport for children in the Palnackie Primary School catchment area will be provided should they choose to attend Dalbeattie Primary School.

3.7 Stakeholders that met HM Inspectors, main concern in regard to the impact on the community is what will happen to the building should the proposal be agreed. Most stakeholders would like to see the building and grounds to be repurposed for community benefit, such as an outdoor learning space or playground. HM Inspectors recommend that if this proposal is agreed the council continue to work with community to consider future use of the site.

4. Summary

HM Inspectors agree that there are educational benefits to Dumfries and Galloway Council's proposal to permanently close Palnackie Primary School and re-align the catchment to Dalbeattie Primary School. Almost all stakeholders agree with the proposal. Children are settled at their current school. It is unlikely that the numbers of school age children that would be in the Palnackie Primary School catchment will increase significantly in the coming years. All stakeholders accept that the falling school rolls mean that this change is required. In considering reasonable alternatives, the council considered a range of factors and HM Inspectors agree with the educational benefits set out in the current context. If the council proceeds with the proposal, it should continue to liaise with stakeholders about the future use of the school building.

HM Inspectors
November 2025