

APPENDIX 1

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

PROPOSAL TO CHANGE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT BANAVIE PRIMARY SCHOOL, FORT WILLIAM

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS STATEMENT

THIS IS A CONSULTATIVE PAPER PREPARED IN TERMS OF THE EDUCATION AUTHORITY'S AGREED PROCEDURE TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE SCHOOLS (CONSULTATION) (SCOTLAND) ACT 2010

This paper sets out a proposal by Highland Council to close the Special Class at Banavie Primary School. If agreed the proposal would be implemented as soon as possible after the start of the new school session in August 2011.

Background

- 1.1 Banavie Primary School has a special class for pupils with severe or profound disabilities. There are presently 3 pupils, all of whom are in P7 and who will transfer to Lochaber High School in August 2011. The class is presently staffed with a teacher and three Learning Support Auxiliaries, who have varying weekly hours. In the past the class has accommodated a larger number of pupils.
- 1.2 The school has historically taken pupils with additional support needs from the whole of the Lochaber area, with some past pupils making round trips of around 50 miles to attend. In this way the Special Class, although part of a mainstream school, has enrolled pupils in a manner analogous to a Special School.
- 1.3 The accommodation for the Special Class is cramped and it is generally recognised that it does not meet modern expectations of accommodation for pupils with high levels of additional need.
- 1.4 Since the Special Class was established, legislation and policy within this area have moved on and there is a consensus that the vast majority of children with additional support needs are best educated within their local school, through the application of the principle of inclusion. It is the responsibility of the

education authority to ensure that schools have the necessary resources in terms of staff and equipment to meet the needs of all the pupils enrolled.

- 1.5 Relevant legislation is now in line with the above principles. S.15 of The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000 establishes what is effectively a presumption in favour of "mainstream" education for all children in Scotland and strengthens the rights of children with additional support needs to be educated alongside their peers in a mainstream setting. The Act does recognise that mainstream schools do not necessarily represent the most suitable educational setting for every pupil but explicitly presumes that cases of children being educated within special schools will only arise exceptionally.
- 1.6 Taking the above into account, Highland Council believes it unlikely that there will be a continued need for a dedicated Special Class within Banavie Primary School, to serve the whole of the Lochaber area.

2 Alternative Facilities

- 2.1 For the reasons set out above, there are currently no locally available alternative facilities of this type within the primary school sector. Specialist facilities do exist elsewhere within Highland and in Scotland and the UK more generally. Where necessary these might be accessed for local pupils with high levels of need, although this would be a last resort as it would mean pupils being educated outwith their own communities, and would only be undertaken with the agreement of the parents of the child affected.
- 2.2 Highland Council has approved proposals to build two new primary school complexes with the Fort William area. The provision of a new resourced base for pupils with additional support needs will be considered as part of the designs for the new builds.

3 Educational Benefits

- 3.1 The proposal would only take effect after the departure for High School of the 3 existing pupils. Consequently no current pupils or parents would be directly affected. Formal closure of the Special Class would mean that parents of any future pupils with high level additional needs would no longer have the option of seeking a placement within Banavie Special Class. However, as a result of the policy and legislative changes of recent years, pupils with Additional Support Needs are already being accommodated in their local schools with the necessary additional resource and that this is why there are no further pupils waiting in the wings for the Banavie Special Class. Therefore the Council is simply formalising what is already happening by parental choice and the application of the premise of inclusion. Highland Council considers that the proposal would have the educational benefits in terms of ensuring that pupils would be educated within their own communities, amongst their peer group; and in terms of reductions in travelling time for pupils.
- 3.2 As all the existing pupils would have left prior to any closure, the travelling arrangements for current pupils would not be affected.
- 3.3 The proposal would have no effect on any current school catchment areas.

4 Effect on staff

- 4.1 The permanent teacher at Banavie Special Class retired last year and the post is presently covered by a teacher on a temporary contract. Efforts will be to redeploy the auxiliary staff in line with Council policy.

5 Effect on the Local Community

- 5.1 Highland Council does not envisage any negative effects on the local community as a result of the current proposals. There may be some positive effects in that educating children with ASN within their local schools would promote greater acceptance of the principles of inclusion within communities generally.

6 Financial Consequences

- 6.1 The current annual revenue budget for the Special Class is £75,734. It is envisaged that the teacher post for the class will be deleted with a consequent annual saving of £42,243. Other existing staff will be redeployed to meet needs elsewhere and the associated costs will remain on the budget.
- 6.2 There will be no direct impact on capital expenditure. The current accommodation will remain within Banavie Primary School. Its' future use will be determined by the school's Head Teacher. It may however be possible to retain the area as a learning support base/breakout space for future pupils with additional support needs, who would attend mainstream classes but who might require a differentiated curriculum that could be delivered in part through use of the current accommodation for the special class.

7 Summary

- 7.1 There will be no pupils at Banavie Special Class for session 2011-12 and, given current legislation and policy, none are expected in the foreseeable future. Any future demand is likely to be in the form of a single pupil at any one time and to be enrolled as the only child within a special class would not be beneficial to any pupil. The current accommodation is also of poor quality for its current purpose.

8 Recommendation

- 8.1 For the reasons set out in this paper, the Highland Council proposes the closure of the Special Class at Banavie Primary.
- 8.2 The Council must formally consult on changes to provision, hence the options to be considered in terms of the Council's policy on changes to educational provision. This consultation paper is issued in terms of the authority's agreed procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation period, a report and submissions received will be presented to the ECS Committee of the Highland Council.