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 13<sup>th</sup> April 2011

Dear Rosemary,

I am writing concerning the proposed closure of the Special Class at Banavie School, obviously not as a parent or as a member of staff affected by this, but as an additional support needs teacher who has worked for a short time within the unit and for several years in the school in which it is housed.

Parents of children with high tariff special needs have the right to send those children to their local school and often choose to do so for a variety of reasons. Perhaps they wish them to attend the same school as their siblings, don't want them to have to travel further than is necessary or simply want them to attend a mainstream school because of the perceived stigma of attending a 'special' class.

All of these reasons are perfectly acceptable and understandable but I wonder how many of these parents are made fully aware of the other choice. How much promotion is given to the value of what is on offer in a dedicated Special Class?

The present class is set within a school and although the size of the room and facilities may not be ideal in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they are adequate for a small number of pupils. Adequate is at least better than non-existent.

There is a small kitchen which has a sink, fridge, cooker, washing machine and tumble-drier. The disabled toilet contains a bath with an overhead shower and an adjustable bed. The classroom, which has a television and computer, can if necessary, be divided in to two separate spaces by pulling over the folding partition.

Any shortcomings in the physical set-up are more than made up for in the attention given to the children. The current staff have years of experience. Every day is dedicated to the well-being of each child, guiding them over the weeks and months to achieve their full potential.

The staff deal with their individual needs in many areas: social skills, life skills, physical needs, communication and where appropriate, curricular progress. The children are also included alongside their peers, in subjects such P.E., art and music and enjoy sharing the same playtimes. This has proved to be beneficial in the social and emotional development of the mainstream pupils who learn patience, empathy and tolerance.

The Special Class pupils are not included in a mainstream class on a daily basis for inclusion's sake. With the best will in the world a mainstream class teacher will not find it easy to meaningfully occupy such children for 5 hours a day, 5 days a week when he or she must also consider the needs and education of up to 30 other pupils. This can result in the teacher feeling stressed and guilty and the child feeling levels of frustration and boredom.

Every child, whatever their ability, has the right to be taught in a situation where the staff have the training, time and facilities to ensure that each of their pupils will have the best possible start in life. I am sure that the parents of the current Special Class pupils are extremely glad that their children are eleven and not five years old