

## APPENDIX 4

### Consultation proposal by The Highland Council

#### Report by HM Inspectorate of Education addressing educational aspects of the proposal to close the special class at Banavie Primary School, Fort William

##### Introduction

1.1 The Highland Council proposes to close the special class at Banavie Primary School from August 2011. The special class currently has a roll of three P7 pupils, all of whom will be attending Lochaber High School from August 2011.

1.2 The report from HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) is required under the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. It has been prepared by HMIE in accordance with the terms of the Act.

1.3 HM Inspectors undertook the following activities in considering the educational aspects of the proposal:

- attendance at the public meeting held on 28 April 2011 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;
- consideration of further information on all schools affected; and
- a visit to the site of Banavie Primary School, including discussion with relevant consultees.

1.4 HMIE considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children at 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 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

- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

## **2. Consultation process**

2.1 The Highland Council undertook the initial consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The consultation included an invitation for written submissions and a public meeting, held in April 2011. The proceedings at the public meeting were recorded and written transcripts were submitted as part of the consultation process.

2.2 There was opposition to the proposals from parents and others within the communities affected. This opposition was expressed at the public meeting and in subsequent written submissions.

2.3 Parents and other stakeholders at the public meeting and in subsequent written submissions expressed a number of concerns about the consequences of the formal closure of the special class in Banavie Primary School. The Highland Council stated in its proposal that following formal closure, parents of children who may have severe and complex additional support needs would not then be able to seek placement within the facilities in the special class in Banavie Primary School. Such children would in future be included within their designated schools with appropriate support and adapted facilities. Parents and other stakeholders expressed the view that mainstream education within designated catchment area schools may not be appropriate for some children with severe and complex additional support needs. The permanent closure of the facilities at the special class in Banavie Primary School would, in their view, not allow a full range of facilities to be offered to children and young people, from within the area, who had severe and complex additional support needs. Concern was expressed that aspects of the present facilities within the special class in Banavie Primary School, such as private washing areas may not be available in other schools within the catchment area.

2.4 A concern also related to The Highland Council's statement within the consultation papers that there were no pupils currently awaiting placement within the special class at Banavie Primary School. It was stated at the public meeting and in subsequent written submissions that a family with a child with additional support needs had recently moved to the area. The child would be eligible to enrol in primary school in August 2013.

## **3. Educational aspects of the proposal**

3.1 There will be no effects on the education of children at present attending the special class at Banavie Primary School as a result of its permanent closure. The Highland Council's proposals would take effect from August 2011. There are currently three children in P7 attending the special class. All will be enrolling in Lochaber High School in August 2011. All specifically adapted equipment such as specialised wheelchairs and desks will be moved to Lochaber High School for the children's use in their secondary school education. Members of the support staff

presently working with the children will also move to support the children within Lochaber High School.

3.2 The proposals will have no significant effect on the education of children with severe and complex additional needs who may become pupils in Banavie Primary School within two years. The Highland Council within its proposals makes clear its commitment to meet the needs of such pupils fully. The proposals state that the special class facilities will be retained for future use by pupils with additional support needs as part of an agreed package of support for children enrolled in Banavie Primary School. The Highland Council acknowledges within its proposal that such support may include use of the current accommodation for the special class as part of an agreed differentiated curriculum, determined by need.

3.3 The permanent closure of the special class may have some effects on the education of children with severe and complex additional needs due to become pupils in other schools within two years. The Highland Council state in their proposals that children with severe and complex needs who may be due to enrol in schools within the local area, but not within the catchment area of Banavie Primary School, will now have their needs met within their own school, without the option of making a placing request to the special class at Banavie Primary School. The Highland Council recognises within in its proposals that there are children for whom such a setting would not be appropriate. The proposals state there may be a need in future for children to receive specialised support outwith their local area, and that such a move would only be undertaken with the agreement of parents and the child. The council may wish to explore whether temporary closure of the special class in Banavie Primary School, allowing for the facilities to be re-opened for use determined by the needs of children in the local area as necessary, may allow a wider range of options for parents and staff in determining the most appropriate placement for children with additional support needs. In taking forward its proposals The Highland Council should set out more clearly why such a temporary closure would not in the short term produce greater educational benefit than the permanent closure set out in the consultation proposals.

3.4 The Highland Council's proposals may enable some efficiencies accruing from the closure to contribute to the overall benefit of children and young people elsewhere in the council area. These relate to staffing costs as the teacher post for the class, at present a temporary post, will no longer be needed.

3.5 The Highland Council in its proposals stated that the two primary school complexes to be built within the Fort William area would minimise or avoid any detrimental effects for children within the local area who may have severe or complex additional support needs. The council proposes to complete the amalgamated primary school in Fort William in August 2013 and the integrated primary school campus in Caol in August 2014. The Highland Council states in its proposals that the provision of a new resource base for children with additional support needs "*will be considered as part of the designs for the new builds*". In taking forward its proposals, The Highland Council should respond to concerns expressed during the consultation process by confirming that the schools will have

appropriate facilities for children with additional support needs and by clarifying the extent and nature of these facilities.

3.6 The Highland Council indicates that the proposal will bring educational benefit for children by ensuring that children would be educated within their own communities with their peer group. The Highland Council states clearly its policy to meet the needs of children with additional support needs in accordance with a presumption for mainstream education with their peers. The current proposals do not yet make clear how such benefits would accrue as a direct result of the permanent closure of the special class in Banavie Primary School.

#### **4. Summary**

4.1 The proposal by The Highland Council to close the special class in Banavie Primary School from August 2011 will have no effect on children currently within the special class. The proposals have the potential to offer only limited educational benefits to children who may enrol in Banavie Primary School, and to children in the wider community within The Highland Council. These benefits relate to staffing efficiencies accruing from the closure which may contribute to the overall benefit of children and young people elsewhere in the council area. These efficiencies, largely through the cessation of the employment of the temporary teacher, would also accrue were the class to be temporarily closed.

4.2 The first of the new primary schools in the Fort William area will not be completed until August 2013 and the second will not be completed until August 2014. The council should respond to concerns expressed during the consultation process regarding the extent and nature of the facilities for children with additional support needs within these schools. In taking forward the proposals, the council should also ensure that it has fully explored alternatives to the permanent closure of the special class at Banavie Primary School. Further work is needed by the council to assess the educational benefits of the possible temporary closure of the special class in Banavie Primary School, allowing for re-opening as needed. The council should set out more clearly why such a temporary closure would not, in the short term, offer education benefits for children, allowing greater choice for parents and staff in determining the most appropriate placement for children with additional support needs, pending the opening of the proposed new facilities in the Fort William area in August 2013.

**HM Inspectorate of Education  
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