



Brentwood
Tomonie
Banavie
Fort William
PH33 7LX

5th May 2011

Dear Rosemary

Re: Proposal to Close the Special Class at Banavie Primary School

I am writing again following the meeting which was held on the 28th of April 2011 regarding the closure of the special class at Banavie Primary School. I personally felt that the aims of the council is to close the special class and that the consultation period is only a formality.

It was clear from the meeting that previously children with special needs either went to mainstream school or to the special class. I question why this is so and feel that the meeting representatives seemed to group pupils with special needs in one category, not looking at each child as an individual, by placing them in either the class or not. Why can't a child have part-time special needs education and part-time mainstream education. Would this not meet the needs of the children and also address 'The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000'? We must also remember that some children with special needs may not be able to attend mainstream education and some may not need special needs education. Surely we should try to meet the needs of the individual and not meet the needs of the education department. I also ask if you close this facility where will pupils go to be educated who need either full or part time special needs education?

I, like the committee representatives, believe in inclusion to break down prejudices in society but this is not always possible. Children with special needs need to form their own peer group. By making them integrate into mainstream education you are not meeting all their needs. Some children may find it difficult to interact with mainstream children due to cognitive, physical, emotional, social and communication deficits. They may not be age appropriate to be in a class who are developing at a faster rate and don't have the skills to maintain the level. I pose a question to you:

How many true real friends that you socialise/interact with on a regular basis do you have who has a learning difficulty such as autism or down's syndrome?

I also felt the council are not wanting to continue to employ a qualified special needs teacher. I sincerely hope that this is not the case for the children with special needs who reside in the Lochaber area. I myself am an occupational therapist who has specialist in Stroke. If I was asked to work in a different area e.g. respiratory or oncology, I would need extensive training to meet the needs of this client group. I believe the teachers at Banavie Primary School are of the highest excellent standard but they are not special needs teachers. You need a qualified special needs teacher to enhance the learning and abilities of children with special needs. The special needs teacher is also a support for other teachers who may have children in their class who are either full or part time in mainstream education.

As I have written previously, I believe the special class at Banavie Primary School should remain open and all children who require it should be offered the service either on a full or part time basis. This would meet the individual needs of each child who lives in the area. Enhancing their learning in an appropriate environment which helps develop peer relationships at the same time. We as a family will be looking to the council to provide a qualified special needs teacher to educate our daughter on a regular weekly basis and offer her the peer support she requires to develop into a well-rounded adult. Life can be hard enough trying to look after a child with special needs without having to worry about and fight for their education rights.

Yours sincerely

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Jennifer Ridland

cc Bill Clark Councillor
Eddie Hunter Councillor
Mrs Durham Head Teacher Banavie Primary School
Hugh Fraser Education Director
Charles Kennedy MP