

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND ADULT SERVICES COMMITTEE

The proposal is to discontinue education provision at Dalwhinnie Primary School and Nursery, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Newtonmore Primary School and Nursery.

PROPOSAL PAPER AND EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS STATEMENT

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

The Highland Council is proposing, subject to the outcome of the statutory consultation process:

- To discontinue education provision at Dalwhinnie Primary School, which is currently mothballed, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Newtonmore Primary School. (Maps of the current catchment areas are at **Appendices A - Aii**).
- The proposal would apply to both the primary and pre-school stages of education at Dalwhinnie Primary. Nursery classes form an integral part of provision at all 3 schools and for the avoidance of doubt, any reference in this document to Primary Schools at Dalwhinnie, Gergask and Newtonmore should be taken as a reference to both the primary and nursery classes.
- The proposed changes, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.

Legislative Background

- 1.1 The proposal is advanced within the context of all applicable legislation. Amongst other duties, education authorities are required to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education (S.1 of the Education Act 1980); and to endeavour to secure improvement in the quality of school education in schools that are managed by them (S.3 of The Standards in Scotland's Schools Act 2000).
- 1.2 Dalwhinnie Primary School is a rural school within the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland Act 2010) and the Council has had regard to the provisions of that Act, in particular the heightened consideration to be given to rural school closures.

Reason for the Proposal

- 2.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:
 - No children have attended Dalwhinnie Primary School since the end of session 2011-12, when the school was mothballed.

- Current population figures within the school catchment indicate a maximum school roll of 5 by 2019-20.
- A school roll of this size provides significant impediments to the successful implementation of a Curriculum for Excellence (details below);
- A school roll of 5 hampers social interaction opportunities for children, who conversely benefit from attending larger schools amongst more children of their own age.
- The Council has explored alternatives in arriving at this proposal, explained further below.

Examination of Alternatives

- 3.1 In bringing forward this proposal for closure, the Council must have special regard to any viable alternatives to closure. The alternatives to closure would be:
- to re-open Dalwhinnie Primary School, either with its current catchment area or an extended catchment area, or;
 - to continue with the current “mothballing” arrangement.
- 3.2 In considering the re-opening of the school, the Council has investigated the long-term roll projections as well as demographic information (See Section 4 below).
- 3.4 Prior to the school being mothballed, an alternative management arrangement was put in place, under which Dalwhinnie Primary School was managed as part of a “cluster” arrangement with Newtonmore Primary School. However, alternative management arrangements are not able to address the wider population issues within the Dalwhinnie area.
- 3.5 There has been no significant rise to the school age population of Dalwhinnie since the school was mothballed in 2012.
- 3.6 The current proposal follows informal discussions between Highland Council officials; local elected members and local representative organisations. Informal meetings with the latter were held as follows:
- Gergask Primary School Parent Council (1 September 2015)
 - Newtonmore Primary School Parent Council (1 September 2015)
 - Laggan Community Association (10 September 2015)
 - Newtonmore and Vicinity Community Council (5 October 2015)
 - Dalwhinnie Community Council (26 October 2015)
- 3.7 In the event of a school closure being approved, consideration is required on the most appropriate way to re-zone the Dalwhinnie catchment. Further discussion on this can be found at Section 16 below.
- 3.8 The detail of the Council’s consideration of the alternatives is set out throughout this proposal paper and its appendices. A brief summary is at **Appendix B**.

Re-Opening of Dalwhinnie Primary School with Current Catchment Area

- 4.1 There are currently (September 2015) four pupils of P1-7 age living within the catchment area of the school. Two of these pupils are in P7 at present and one attends Gàidhlig Medium education. At present (August 2015) there are two children of nursery age within the catchment, both in N4, and an additional two of pre-nursery age.
- 4.2 The above figures suggest that, were Dalwhinnie School to re-open with 100% of catchment pupils attending the school, the roll figures for the forthcoming few years would be:
- 2016-17 - 4
2017-18 - 4
2018-19 - 5
2019-20 - 5
- 4.3 For such a small catchment, the calculation of expected births per year is imprecise. Based on an analysis of the age of females living in the area, the suggested range would be around an average of 0.5 to 0.7 births per year. In practice the number each year will vary with consequent fluctuations in the roll. Six new houses have been built in Dalwhinnie during the last 15 years giving an average of 0.4 per year. The Cairngorm National Park Local Plan has three potential building plots with a capacity of around 20 houses but there is little demand (at least one site has a long history and was granted planning permission in the early 2000s, which has lapsed without any activity).
- 4.4 The population living in the catchment fell by 10% between 2001 and 2011 and the population of the primary catchment is older than the Highland average with 14% aged 16 to 29 and 16% aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively).
- 4.5 The long term roll at Dalwhinnie is probably in the region of 4 to 6 pupils albeit with year to year fluctuations around these figures. These roll projections indicate that if Dalwhinnie Primary were re-opened, it would be as a single teacher school with a very small roll. Highland Council considers that these circumstances present significant impediments to learning and teaching. Further detail is provided at Section 11.
- 4.6 As previously stated, the school has not been operational since July 2012. No placing requests in or out of Dalwhinnie Primary School were recorded in the two sessions prior to mothballing (2010-11 and 2011-12).
- 4.7 If the school were to re-open, the four potential pupils would have shorter journey times to school than they do at present. Further details on travel journeys to school are provide at Sections 12 and 16 below.

Re-Opening of Dalwhinnie Primary School with Expanded Catchment Area

- 5.1 Consideration has been given to extending the Dalwhinnie PS catchment areas. However, any proposal to extend the Dalwhinnie PS catchment into the Gergask catchment needs to take account of the fact that Gergask

Primary is itself a rural school located in an area which in recent years has experienced a falling overall population and a falling school roll.

- 5.2 Newtonmore Primary is also a rural school. It has experienced a rising roll in recent years although the projection suggests a fall in the longer term.
- 5.3 Current legislation requires that any consultation on changing the catchment areas of schools requires consultation with the parents of any affected school. Informal consultation with the Parent Councils of Gergask and Newtonmore Primaries suggests that parents at both schools would be strongly opposed to any reduction in the catchment areas of their respective schools.
- 5.4 From the copies of the school catchment areas (Appendix A – Aii) it can be seen that, within the Gergask catchment, the nearest habitation to Dalwhinnie is at Catlodge, 5.7 miles, 9 minutes to Dalwhinnie. Catlodge is however located 2.4 miles and 4 minutes from Gergask Primary. It would be illogical to transfer Catlodge into the Dalwhinnie catchment.
- 5.5 Within the Newtonmore catchment, the nearest communities to Dalwhinnie are at Etteridge, located 4.9 miles/10 minutes from Newtonmore, and 8.8 miles and 14 minutes from Dalwhinnie; and at Crubenmore, located 6 miles/11 minutes from Newtonmore and 5 miles/9 minutes from Dalwhinnie. The respective distances militate against a transfer of Etteridge from Newtonmore to Dalwhinnie. Whilst it would be theoretically possible for transfer Crubenmore to the Dalwhinnie catchment, this would require a public consultation on a recommendation likely to be opposed by Newtonmore parents. Due to the small numbers involved, the change would do nothing to make the roll at Dalwhinnie more viable.
- 5.6 Transferring Etteridge and Catlodge to the Dalwhinnie catchment would result in longer journeys to school for any affected pupils.

Continuation of “Mothballing”

- 6.1 Although it would be possible to continue with the current “mothballing” arrangement, Highland Council does not consider that would represent the best option for the community or the taxpayer. “Mothballing” would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the school. The Council would also be burdened with the costs of maintaining a “mothballed” building.
- 6.2 Scottish Government guidance relating to the mothballing of schools makes it clear that mothballing is a temporary measure and should not be used to undermine the requirements to undertake a statutory school closure consultation.
- 6.3 Current school transport arrangements would not be affected by a continuation of mothballing.
- 6.4 As the Dalwhinnie school building is not currently in use, a continuation of mothballing would have no impact on the community.

General Background

7.1 Between 2001 and 2011 (Census figures) the population of Highland grew by 11% but the population of the Kingussie High Associated School Group (ASG) area grew by 20%, mainly as a result of economic growth and new house building in Aviemore in the north of the ASG area, which accounts for almost half of the ASG population. During this period the Kingussie High School roll rose from 417 (2001) to 458 (2010) before falling to 379 for the current session. The population of the Kingussie ASG area is slightly older than the Highland average with 10.2% aged 16 to 29 and 19% aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively).

The birth rate (the true birth rate measured as births per year per 1,000 women aged X years) tends to be slightly above the Highland average although these figures are dominated by the vibrant population in Aviemore.

7.2 The reference above to "...per 1,000 woman aged X years" is included because there is a different expected birth rate for women depending on their age. For example the expected birth rate for a woman aged 25 is higher than for a women aged 45. The Council has looked at the ages of each woman in the area and applied the expected rate to each before adding them together to come up with the final figure.

7.3 The consultation process for this proposal is set out in detail at **Appendix C**.

Current Details – Dalwhinnie Primary School

8.1 Dalwhinnie Primary is located in the village of the same name, off the A889 road. The A9 Trunk Road also passes close to the village. The catchment area stretches along the A9 south east to Drumochter Pass and north east to just beyond Cuaich. Along the A889, the catchment extends to just beyond the Allt An't Sluic.

8.2 The school has been mothballed since the end of session 2011-12 when the school roll fell to 2, and the pupils transferred to Newtonmore Primary School.

8.3 The accommodation at Dalwhinnie consists of 1 classroom for school age children & 1 for nursery (the downstairs part of the former old school house was converted for this purpose). There is also a small through area used for eating packed lunches and for small group work, a shared office for the Head Teacher and school clerical assistant, a staffroom and 2 storerooms, (the last being converted bedrooms in the former schoolhouse). The outside areas consisted of a tarmac & grass playground, wildlife/herb garden, and walled grassed with a community playground. PE was taken in the local village hall, 2-3 minutes' walk from the school, or by travel to Newtonmore PS for participation in group/team activities.

8.4 The current and future projected rolls are set out at paragraphs 4.1 - 4.5 above.

8.5 The school has a permanent capacity of 25. Based on the permanent capacity available, the notional 2019-20 roll of 5 pupils would represent 20% use of capacity.

- 8.6 The Highland Council assesses all of its schools for Suitability and Condition, in line with the Scottish Government's School Estate Management guidelines. Schools are assessed on a scale with the ratings "A" (good) "B" (satisfactory), "C" (poor) and "D" (bad). Dalwhinnie Primary School is currently rated as "B" for educational suitability and "B" for building condition.
- 8.7 The number of pupils within the catchment area entitled to free school meals is not broken down to avoid the identification of pupils.
- 8.8 The most recent HMIE report was published in January 2008. **A copy is at Appendix D.**
- 8.9 When the school was last in operation, it was managed as part of a "cluster" arrangement with Newtonmore Primary School. Were the school to re-open with the roll figures indicated, the staffing entitlements, as per the Council's current Devolved School Management policy are as follows;
- Associate (Cluster) Head Teacher – 1.00 FTE shared between 2 schools.
 Unpromoted Teachers – 1.00 FTE
 Class Contact Time Teacher 0.1 FTE
 Clerical Assistant – 16 hours per week
- 8.10 In addition ASN teaching and non-teaching staff would be allocated to the school in accordance with an annual assessment of need.
- 8.11 A Cleaning Operative would also be employed at around 7.5 hours per week.
- 8.12 School meals were not provided at Dalwhinnie School, prior to it being mothballed.
- 8.13 If the school were re-opened none of the current pupils would qualify for school transport.
- 8.14 Annual CO₂ emissions from the Dalwhinnie School building are estimated at 8 tonnes

Current Details – Newtonmore Primary

- 9.1 Newtonmore Primary School is located within the village of the same name. The school offers both English and Gàidhlig Medium education from P1-7, and pre-school education in both languages. The accommodation consists of 5 classrooms for school age children and 1 for nursery, (which has an English session in the morning & Gàidhlig session in the afternoon), a school hall used for PE & school lunches, a kitchen, a General Purpose Room, 2 Tutorial Rooms, Staffroom, Head Teacher Office, School Office, and central resource area. The outside areas consist of a tarmac playground, herb garden, school garden, playing field (only P4-7 pupils are allowed to use this as pupils have to cross a small road to reach it) and cycle shed.
- 9.2 For the 2015-16 school session, the school has 115 pupils in P1-7. There are 84 English Medium pupils in 4 classes, and 31 Gàidhlig Medium pupils in two

classes. The projected roll through to 2029-30 suggests a modest decline, with a total roll of 95 by August 2029.

- 9.3 There are currently 20 children in the English Medium Nursery and 8 in the Gàidhlig Medium nursery.
- 9.4 During the last 5 completed school sessions (2010-11 to 2014-15) there have been nine placing requests for pupils from other areas to join Newtonmore Primary. Eight placing requests have been made for pupils to leave Newtonmore Primary.
- 9.5 The population living in the catchment increased by 10% between 2001 and 2011 and the population of the primary catchment is slightly older than the Highland average, with 14% aged 16 to 29 and 16% aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively). Analysis of the age of females living in the area using fertility rates for Badenoch & Strathspey overall suggests that we might expect to see an average of around 9 births per year: the recent historic average has been above this.
- 9.6 The school has a permanent capacity of 122. The August 2015 roll of 115 pupils therefore represents 94% use of capacity.
- 9.7 Newtonmore Primary is currently assessed as “B” for Suitability and “B” for Condition. Future investment need within the school will be assessed as part of the Council’s capital programme and maintenance programmes, and based on the ‘core facts’ of condition, suitability and sufficiency.
- 9.8 The number entitled to free school meals is not broken down to avoid the identification of pupils.
- 9.9 The year group numbers enrolled for English Medium education in August 2015 were as follows:
- N3 - 11
 - N4 - 9
 - P1 – 13
 - P2 – 12
 - P3 – 8
 - P4 – 16
 - P5 – 13
 - P6 – 10
 - P7 – 12
- 9.10 The class structure is P1-2 – 19 pupils, P2-4 - 22 pupils, P4-5, 21 pupils P6-7, 22 pupils, with a single English Medium nursery class.
- 9.11 The year group numbers enrolled for Gàidhlig Medium education in August 2015 were as follows:
- N3 - 1
 - N4 - 7
 - P1 – 4
 - P2 – 8

P3 – 5
P4 – 4
P5 – 4
P6 – 1
P7 – 5

- 9.12 The class structure is anticipated to be P1-3 – 17 pupils, P4-7 – 14 pupils, with a single Gàidhlig Medium nursery class.
- 9.13 The most recent HMle report was published in February 2010. A copy is at **Appendix E**.
- 9.14 The 2014-15 staffing entitlements, as per the Council's Devolved School Management policy are as follows;
- Head Teacher – 1.00FTE
Principal Teacher – 1.00FTE
Unpromoted Teachers – 4.70 FTE
Class Contact Time Teachers – 0.50 FTE
Clerical Assistant/General Auxiliary – 20 hours per week
- 9.15 In addition, the school nursery is staffed with four Early Years Practitioners, who are each employed for 23 hours per week.
- 9.16 The Catering and Cleaning Service employs the following staff at the school;
- Cook 3 HC4 - 29.25 hours per week
2 Cook HC2 posts made up of 1 x 17.5 hours per week and 1 x 16.25 hrs per week
- Cleaning Supervisor HC4 - 15.00 hours per week
Cleaning Operative HC1 – 10.00 hours per week.
- 9.17 ASN teaching and non-teaching staff are allocated to the school in accordance with an annual assessment of need.
- 9.18 At present, 4 school transport routes operate to Newtonmore Primary School, transporting a total of 10 school pupils. Currently therefore, approximately 9% of the pupil population are in receipt of school transport.
- 9.19 Annual CO₂ emissions from Newtonmore Primary School building are estimated at 38 tonnes. This figure would not be affected by the formal closure of Dalwhinnie Primary School.
- 9.20 As all of the pupils from the Dalwhinnie catchment area currently attend either Newtonmore or Gergask Primary Schools, no adverse effects for Newtonmore Primary are expected to arise.

Current Details – Gergask Primary

- 10.1 Gergask Primary School is located within the village of Laggan. The school has three classrooms within the original building. These are used for the Nursery, the P1-7 class and a breakout space/resource area. In addition, there is Spey Lodge (portacabin) housing the school office and dining area. This is also used as a GP room. School lunches are brought in from Newtonmore School kitchen daily. There is no gym hall but the school have use of Laggan Village Hall for PE and other school events. The school is in the process of converting the use of an outbuilding to create a new library. There is a good sized, well equipped playground with picnic benches, Wendy house, sandpit, bird hide, bike shed, shelter and climbing wall. A shed houses the playground toys and the school has use of a container for further storage. In addition, there is also a playing field with a trim trail area. The school also has the use of a field adjacent to the school and has developed this as a croft and wildlife garden
- 10.2 For the 2015-16 school session, the school has 13 pupils in P1-7. Projections suggest the school will experience a gently rising roll through to 2029-30, with a total roll of 24 by August 2029.
- 10.3 There are currently 5 children in the pre-school nursery.
- 10.4 During the last 5 completed school sessions (2010-11 to 2014-15) there have been two placing requests for pupils from other areas to join Gergask Primary. Eight placing requests have been made for pupils to leave Gergask Primary.
- 10.5 The population living in the catchment fell by 15% between 2001 and 2011 and the population of the primary catchment has more people than the Highland average in their 20s, with 23% aged 16 to 29 and 15% aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively). Analysis of the age of females living in the area using fertility rates for Badenoch & Strathspey overall suggests that we might expect to see an average of around 2 births per year: the recent historic average has been above this.
- 10.6 The school has a permanent capacity of 25. The August 2015 roll of 13 pupils therefore represents 52% use of capacity.
- 10.7 Gergask Primary is currently assessed as “B” for Suitability and “B” for Condition. Future investment need within the school will be assessed as part of the Council’s capital programme and maintenance programmes, and based on the ‘core facts’ of condition, suitability and sufficiency.
- 10.8 The number entitled to free school meals is not broken down to avoid the identification of pupils.
- 10.9 The year group numbers for August 2015 were as follows:
- N3 - 3
 - N4 - 2
 - P1 – 2
 - P2 – 1
 - P3 – 2
 - P4 – 0

P5 – 2
P6 – 2
P7 – 4

- 10.10 The class structure will be P1 to P7 – 13 pupils. The five nursery pupils are organised into a single class.
- 10.11 The most recent HMIe report was published in February 2010. A copy is at **Appendix F**.
- 10.12 The 2014-15 staffing entitlements, as per the Council's Devolved School Management policy are as follows;
- Associate Head Teacher, Gergask and Kingussie Primaries – 1.00FTE
Unpromoted Teachers – 1.00 FTE
Class Contact Time Teachers – 0.10 FTE
Clerical Assistant/General Auxiliary – 17 hours per week
Early Years Practitioner – 23 hours per week
- 10.13 The Catering and Cleaning Service employs the following staff at the school;
- Cook HC2 - 17.50 hours per week.
Cleaning Operative HC2 – 11.25 hours per week.
- 10.14 Including the pupils travelling from Dalwhinnie, 2 school transport routes currently operate to Gergask Primary, transporting a total of 6 pupils. Therefore approximately 46% of the pupil population are in receipt of school transport.
- 10.15 Annual CO₂ emissions from Gergask Primary School building are estimated at just under 32 tonnes. This figure would not be affected by the formal closure of Dalwhinnie Primary School.
- 10.16 As all of the pupils from the Dalwhinnie catchment area currently attend either Gergask or Newtonmore Primary Schools, no adverse effects for Gergask Primary are expected to arise.

Educational Benefits

- 11.1 Highland Council is of the view that the school environment should be of a quality that sustains and improves education provision, pupil performance and outcomes for the young people of Highland.
- 11.2 With the above aim in mind, Highland Council has adopted the following indicators in reviewing its school estate:
- Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
 - Pupils should be members of an age-appropriate peer group.
 - Pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the widest possible range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama and art.

- Pupils with Additional Support Needs should be educated in the most appropriate local setting.
- Pupils should not ordinarily be required to travel for longer than 30 minutes from the nearest classified road pick-up point to school (primary) although it is recognised that this may not always be possible in a rural Council area such as Highland.
- School facilities should be of a size appropriate to the delineated area that they serve, paying due regard to demographic trends.
- School delineated areas should reflect geography, travel routes and population distribution.
- Safe school transport should be provided and safe traffic management in and around school sites should be implemented.
- Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising at least 3 members located in the same facility.
- The implications of school location to local communities should be considered.
- Schools, wherever possible, should be located where there is a recognised village or other built up community.

11.3 In 2009 the Scottish Government also set out its vision for the Future School Estate in Scotland, in 'Building Better Schools: Investing in Scotland's Future'. Local Authorities are required to take account of these aspirations in planning changes to their school estate, namely:

- All children and young people will be educated in, and community users will use, schools that are 'fit for purpose' in terms of condition, suitability and sufficiency;
- Schools are well-designed, accessible, inclusive learning environments that inspire and drive new thinking and change and which support the delivery of high quality educational experiences through Curriculum for Excellence;
- Schools are integral parts of the communities they serve, with pupils making use of community facilities and communities accessing school facilities;
- Schools accommodate and provide a range of services, activities and facilities that make a difference to people's health and well-being, to sustaining economic growth and to the strength and vibrancy of communities;
- A sustainable school estate whose design, construction and operation is environmentally and energy efficient; contributes directly to delivering the year-on-year reductions in greenhouse gas emissions introduced by The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, which is resilient to the impact of climate change and which leads by example in matters of environmental performance;
- A school estate that is efficiently run and that maximises value for money;
- A school estate which is flexible and responsive - both to changes in demand for school places and to learners' and teachers' requirements and wishes, and where the beneficial impact of change is maximised by thorough consultation and engagement with users and stakeholders.

11.4 It is Highland Council's view that the pupils from the Dalwhinnie catchment derive educational benefits from their current attendance at the larger neighbouring schools. Formalising the current arrangements would provide a number of such benefits, judged against both the Highland and National criteria set out above.

- 11.5 Pupils at both Newtonmore and Gergask Primary Schools regularly work in co-operative learning groups. Cooperative learning strategy normally involves 4 pupils of roughly the same age group working together. A roll of 4-5, such as that if Dalwhinnie Primary re-opened, would mean that the groups would not only be limited in size but also static, since there would be no possibility of changing the membership of learning groups. A roll of 4-5 would further limit the variety of skills that pupils could bring to the groups, and there would be a smaller range of work to use in terms of sharing standards.
- 11.6 At Newtonmore Primary pupils participate in the Pupil Council; a school Eco-committee; a Charities Committee, and a Rights Respecting School Group; whilst other pupils take roles as Junior Road Safety Officers. Similarly, Gergask Primary has a Pupil Council, an Eco-Committee and a “Fit and Healthy” pupil committee, and as at Newtonmore certain pupils take on the role of Junior Road Safety Officers. It would be very difficult to cover the full range of such activities within the context of a school roll of 4-5 pupils.
- 11.7 The roll out of the 1+2 languages programme over the next 4-5 years requires considerable planning and preparation for delivery in any class setting, but in particular this would prove to be very problematic in a small composite setting. Language learning is by nature a highly interactive activity involving, for example, participatory games, pupils speaking to one another and whole class Q and A sessions. The schools of the Kingussie Associated School Group are adopting French and Mandarin as their two additional languages, whilst Newtonmore also offers Gàidhlig Medium education. Mandarin has been selected because Kingussie High School has been designated as a “Confucius Classroom Hub” as part of an agreement drawn up between the Confucius Institute for Scotland’s Schools in partnership with Tianjin Education Commission. Confucius Hubs are designed to promote the learning and teaching of Chinese language and culture. Delivery of language learning would be very constrained within the context of a school roll of 4 or 5.
- 11.8 It is self-evident that a total school roll of 5 severely restricts opportunities for team sports and other active recreational activities. This applies even to individual sports, where successful learning of skills is helped by talking and sharing of experiences. Creative Dance, performed by pupils at the Badenoch and Strathspey Music Festival, is a particular feature of Gergask Primary, and is an activity where ideas are sought from the children themselves. It further applies to the health and wellbeing element of the curriculum which involves discussion between pupils about health lifestyle choices. Whilst these problems can be overcome by taking the pupils to participate in activities in neighbouring schools, that in itself involves time out of school in travelling to either Newtonmore or Gergask.
- 11.9 Some of the educational benefits arise not just from larger pupil numbers (e.g. to form teams of similar age and size), but also because a larger staff and parent body increases the likelihood of interested adults leading a range of activities. Gergask Primary currently operates after school clubs in shinty, running, cookery and art whilst Newtonmore Primary operates clubs in shinty, hockey, art and Scripture Union.

- 11.10 Other activities such as World Book Day and Book Fairs organised by Scholastic Groups, would be limited in impact within the context of a school roll of 4 or 5.
- 11.11 As with sports, the larger rolls at Newtonmore and Gergask provide a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of solo and group musical and artistic opportunities. Primary schools within the Kingussie ASG host a visiting music specialist and a Kodály Voice Tutor, both of whom engage in whole school and whole class pieces. Pupils at Newtonmore Primary also engage in choral verse.
- 11.12 The proposal would also provide improved opportunities for children to develop skills for learning, life and work e.g. increasing opportunities for working with others of a similar age and stage which are very limited in schools of less than 10 children in a multi-composite setting.
- 11.13 The development of Profiling is a key component for developing the above skills and for children to be able to self-assess and very importantly peer assess these skills as part of ongoing discussion and dialogue with children of the same age/stage.
- 11.14 As part of the Developing Scotland's Young Workforce the aim is to develop increased awareness of the world of work, social skills and employability skills. Such knowledge and understanding and skills acquisition would very much benefit from discussions and dialogue with peers of the same age/stage.
- 11.15 The level to which pupils are able to become skilled in social interaction will depend to an extent on the opportunities afforded to them. The forging of close friendships and the development of self-esteem is enhanced by each pupil being enabled to be part of an age appropriate peer group of a sufficient size to allow a range of interactions and relationships to form and reform.
- 11.16 Staff of partner agencies in Highland have to work across wide geographical areas. A re-opening of Dalwhinnie Primary School would result in re-extending the geographical area that staff from partner agencies would be required to cover, thus decreasing the amount of time available to focus on working with children in the existing operational schools.
- 11.17 In summary, pupils from the community of Dalwhinnie have derived a range of positive educational benefits from the mothballing of Dalwhinnie Primary.
- 11.18 As all of the pupils from the Dalwhinnie catchment currently attend either Gergask or Newtonmore Primaries, no adverse effects for those pupils are expected to arise from the merger.

Effects on School Transport

- 12.1 The table at **Appendix G** shows the school transport routes currently operating to the 2 schools.
- 12.2 During the 2015-16 session, 2 P1-7 pupils will be travelling from the Dalwhinnie catchment to Gergask Primary, with a further three P1-7 pupils

travelling to Newtonmore. Only the pupils travelling to Newtonmore receive funding for transport. Based on current prices and 190 days in the school year, the annual cost is £7,562. This cost would reduce to £1,140 in the event that Dalwhinnie Primary re-opened.

- 12.3 The additional travel time from Dalwhinnie Primary to Newtonmore Primary is approximately 19 minutes in normal conditions.
- 12.4 It is recognised that the larger merged school implies an increase in the number of pupils entitled to school transport compared to the number who can currently walk/cycle to school, should they choose to do so, and the occasional inconvenience for parents who wish to take their child to/from school during the school day, should they require to do so.
- 12.5 The table at **Appendix H** illustrates the additional emissions of greenhouse gases arising from the current transport arrangements from Dalwhinnie Primary to Newtonmore Primary and Gergask Primary. The figures are based on the types of vehicle used and the fuel used by those vehicles and show total CO₂ equivalent emissions, (columns C and D), as well as emissions for CO₂ and CO₂ equivalent emissions for methane and nitrous oxide.
- 12.6 The table shows that the mothballing, and by extension the formal closure of, Dalwhinnie Primary, has resulted in just over 2 tonnes per annum of CO₂ equivalent emissions. The figures can however only be estimates as emissions are affected by the speed at which vehicles are driven and the type of road travelled.
- 12.7 The increased annual CO₂ equivalent emissions from the provision of transport (approximately 2 tonnes) should be set against the approximate annual emissions of 8 tonnes from the Dalwhinnie Primary School building itself (see paragraph 8.14 above), which would be saved in the event of closure.
- 12.8 During the last full school session (2013-14) there were 3 days on which Gergask Primary School did not operate due to bad weather, and 2 days in which this happened at Newtonmore. As Dalwhinnie Primary School was mothballed, we cannot know whether it too would have been closed on the days in question.

Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements

- 13.1 As the school is already “mothballed” there will be no impact on school management arrangements at Newtonmore or Gergask from a formal closure of Dalwhinnie Primary School.
- 13.2 A continuation of the current mothballing arrangement will have no effect on current staffing arrangements.
- 13.3 The staffing implications of re-opening Dalwhinnie Primary School are set out at Paragraph 8.9 above, whilst the financial implications are set out at Section 15 below, and the associated **Appendix I**.

Effect on the Local Community

- 14.1 There is an existing village hall in Dalwhinnie which provides a public space for the local community.
- 14.2 When the school building at Dalwhinnie was first mothballed, a licence to occupy the building was granted to "Dalwhinnie Past and Present" but this arrangement ceased in May 2014.
- 14.3 In the event of the merger proceeding, and subject to the Council not having any operational need for the building, Highland Council would be keen to work with the local community to see whether at least part of the current school building could be turned over to community use. Any such proposal would however have to be progressed within the terms of the Council's current asset management policy.
- 14.4 Paragraph 4.6 above explains that the population of the catchment fell by 10% between 2001 and 2011, during a period when the school was open. Past analyses of rural locations in Highland that have experienced school closures has established no clear relationship between school closures and population patterns.

Financial Consequences

- 15.1 The Table at **Appendix I** sets out the Highland Council's assessment of the Financial Implications of the proposed merger.

Catchment Areas

- 16.1 The distance and driving time between Dalwhinnie Primary School and Newtonmore Primary School is given as 10.9 miles and 19 minutes (source: Google Maps, also AA website) whilst the same source gives the distance and driving time from Dalwhinnie Primary to Gergask Primary as 8.1 miles and 14 minutes. These timings may be regarded as reasonable journey times under normal driving conditions. It is accepted that journey times may be lengthened during periods of adverse weather.
- 16.2 Newtonmore and Gergask Primaries have identical scores for Suitability and Condition.
- 16.3 Although Gergask Primary School is closer to Dalwhinnie than Newtonmore Primary, the school roll is much smaller. The larger pupil and staff numbers at Newtonmore Primary offer more opportunities for pupils to be part of age appropriate peer groups, and for staff to be part of a larger in-school professional network, than would be the case at Gergask Primary.
- 16.4 For the above reasons, Highland Council recommends that the Dalwhinnie PS area is re-assigned to that of Newtonmore Primary School.
- 16.5 Nevertheless, it remains Highland Council's opinion that both Gergask and Newtonmore Primaries offer educational advantages in comparison with a re-opened Dalwhinnie Primary.

- 16.6 Highland Council would nevertheless welcome the community's views on the best way to re-assign the catchment area of Dalwhinnie Primary School.
- 16.7 Whichever decision is taken with respect to catchment areas, existing pupils will not be required to change schools and will continue to qualify for school transport. This will also apply to any younger siblings of such pupils, provided they remain at the same primary school.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 17.1 A preliminary EQIA assessment is at **Appendix J**.

Rural Impact Assessment

- 18.1 A preliminary Rural Impact Assessment is at **Appendix K**.

Mitigation of Adverse Effects

- 19.1 The main adverse effect for children in the P1-7 age group is the length of journey from Dalwhinnie to either Gergask or Newtonmore, details of which are provided above. However, as the school has been mothballed since 2012, all the current pupils are already making this journey, or that to Gergask.
- 19.2 Funded school transport will be provided to P1-7 pupils from Dalwhinnie attending Newtonmore Primary.
- 19.3 Although funded transport is not provided for nursery age children, these children have already been attending either Newtonmore or Gergask Primary for their pre-school education. The journey times involved are not lengthy in comparison to those faced by many other primary and nursery age children in Highland.

Recommendation

- 19.1 Taking the above into account Highland Council recommends that Dalwhinnie Primary School, currently "mothballed," is closed and the catchment area re-assigned to that of Newtonmore Primary.
- 19.2 This proposal paper is issued in terms of the authority's procedures to meet the relevant statutory requirements. Following the consultation period, a report and submissions received will be presented to the Education, Children and Adult Services Committee of the Highland Council.