

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

### CARE AND LEARNING SERVICE

#### REVIEW OF THE PROPOSAL TO DISCONTINUE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AT DALWHINNIE PRIMARY SCHOOL, REASSIGNING ITS CATCHMENT AREA TO THAT OF NEWTONMORE PRIMARY SCHOOL.

This report has been prepared following a review of the proposal:

- To discontinue education provision at Dalwhinnie Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Newtonmore Primary School

Having had regard (in particular) to:

- Relevant written representations received by the Council (from any person) during the consultation period.
- Oral representations made to it (by any persons) at the public meeting held at Dalwhinnie Village Hall on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016.
- The report from Education Scotland.

This document has been issued by the Highland Council under the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.

## CONTENTS

1.0 Background

2.0 Consultation process

3.0 Review of the proposals following the consultation period

4.0 Responses Received

5.0 Summary of issues raised during the consultation period, and Highland Council's responses.

6.0 Community Use of Building

- 7.0 Summary of issues raised by Education Scotland, and Highland Council's Responses.
- 8.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies.
- 9.0 Further Review of Alternatives to Closure
- 10.0 Review of Catchment Issues
- 11.0 Procedure for Ministerial Call-in.
- 12.0 Legal issues
- 13.0 Financial Implications
- 14.0 Equality Impact Assessment
- 15.0 Conclusion
- 16.0 Recommendation

Appendices:

- Appendix 1** - The proposal document and appendices
- Appendix 2** - Minute of public meeting held in Dalwhinnie on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016
- Appendix 3** - Written submissions and questionnaires received
- Appendix 4** - Report from Education Scotland

## **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The Education, Children and Adult Services Committee (ECAS), at its meeting on 20 January 2016, agreed that a statutory consultation be undertaken on the proposal to discontinue the provision of education at Dalwhinnie Primary School, re-assigning its catchment area to that of Newtonmore Primary School.
- 1.2 **Appendix 1** is the original consultative paper and provides full details of the above proposal. **Appendices 1a-1M** are the appendices to the original proposal.
- 1.3 Dalwhinnie Primary School has been “mothballed” since the end of session 2011-12, and current population figures within the school catchment indicate a maximum school roll of 5 by 2019-20. A roll of this size impedes the successful delivery of the curriculum and hampers social interaction opportunities for children.
- 1.4 Since July 2012 pupils from the Dalwhinnie Primary catchment have attended either Newtonmore Primary, 11 miles from Dalwhinnie Primary or Gergask

Primary, 8 miles from Dalwhinnie Primary. These arrangements have been of benefit to the pupils at all 3 schools.

- 1.5 During last session there were 4 children within the P1-7 age in the Dalwhinnie catchment. Three attended Newtonmore Primary (one on Gàidhlig Medium) and one attended Gergask Primary. Two of the children were in P7 and there were a further two in nursery. In the coming session, it is anticipated that all the children from the Dalwhinnie catchment will attend Newtonmore School
- 1.6 The school has a planning capacity of 25. The notional school roll of 5 by 2019-20 would therefore represent 20% use of capacity.
- 1.7 Dalwhinnie Primary School is designated as a rural school under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In that context, the Council has given special regard to:
  - any viable alternative to the closure proposal; alternatives were considered at Sections 3-6 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix 1**) and have been reconsidered again in the light of responses received to consultation – see Sections 5 and 9 below.
  - the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to (a) the sustainability of the community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community. The effect on the local community was considered at Section 14 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix 1**) and is further considered at Section 7 below, taking into account representations received during consultation.
  - the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to;
  - the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact; effects on school transport were considered at Section 12 of the Proposal Paper. (**Appendix 1**).

## **2.0 Consultation process**

2.1 The formal consultation period ran from Monday 1 February 2016 to Friday 18 March 2016. Written representations on the proposal were sought from interested parties as defined within the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.

2.2 In accordance with statutory requirements, the following were consulted:

- (i) Parents of pupils in the catchment area of Dalwhinnie Primary School, and parents of pupils attending Newtonmore and Gergask Primary Schools, including parents of pre-school pupils;
- (ii) All P4-7 pupils attending Newtonmore and Gergask Primary schools.
- (iii) Members of the UK and Scottish Parliaments for the area affected by the proposal;

- (iv) The Parent Councils of Newtonmore and Gergask Primary Schools.
- (v) Staff of Newtonmore and Gergask Primary Schools.
- (vi) Trade union representatives;
- (vii) Newtonmore Community Council, and Dalwhinnie Community Council;
- (viii) Education Scotland;
- (ix) Highland Youth Convenor.
- (x) Bòrd na Gàidhlig
- (xi) Dalwhinnie Past and Present
- (xii) Laggan Community Association
- (xiii) Members of the Highland Community Planning Partnership

2.3 The proposal document was also advertised on the Highland Council website.

2.4 A public meeting was held in Dalwhinnie on the 23 February 2016. The meeting was advertised in advance on the Highland Council website and Facebook page, and in the *Strathspey and Badenoch Herald*. The minute of the meeting is at **Appendix 2**.

### **3.0 Review of proposals following the consultation period**

3.1 Following receipt of written representations received by Highland Council and consideration of oral representations made at the public meeting, officials reviewed the proposals.

3.2 The feedback from the consultation was considered by a range of Council officials. This ensured that the Council met the requirements of the 2010 Act.

3.3 The outcome of this review process is reflected in the response, conclusion and recommendations outlined below.

### **4.0 Responses received**

4.1 The views of pupils at Newtonmore and Gergask Primary School (which included pupils living within the Dalwhinnie catchment area) were sought by means of an age adapted questionnaire completed by the pupils. Copies of the questionnaires returned are at **Appendix 3**.

4.2 A list of others who responded in writing during the public consultation is also at **Appendix 3**, along with copies of these responses

### **5.0 Issues raised during the consultation period**

5.1 There were a total of 71 pupil responses, 64 from Newtonmore Primary and 7 from Gergask Primary. Pupils were given 3 options, i. Close Dalwhinnie, ii. Re-open Dalwhinnie, or iii. Keep Dalwhinnie mothballed. Pupils were also asked an additional question about which school they thought the Dalwhinnie pupils should attend if the school was closed.

5.2 Of the total pupil responses, 31 pupils were in favour of closure, with 20 suggesting keeping the status quo for longer. A further 20 pupils indicated a

preference to reopen Dalwhinnie school. All of the responses in the latter two categories came from Newtonmore Primary.

5.3 All 7 of the Gergask pupils who responded thought that the Dalwhinnie catchment should be re-zoned to the Gergask catchment. Of the 64 responses from Newtonmore, 41 thought the Dalwhinnie catchment should be re-zoned to the Newtonmore catchment; 22 thought the Dalwhinnie catchment should be re-zoned to the Gergask catchment, and one pupil responded by commenting that pupils should have the choice of either school.

5.4 Arguments put forward by pupils supporting the closure were:

- There are not enough children in Dalwhinnie. The school would be too small.
- Dalwhinnie will probably never get enough children.
- It would be better for the Dalwhinnie children to come to a school where they have more children to work and play with.
- It would be very boring if you were the only pupil in school.
- Dalwhinnie Primary would be so small that pupils would not get a chance to mix with and meet new people.
- Closure of Dalwhinnie could help Gergask, which has only 11 pupils left.
- There is a lot of wildlife and countryside at Gergask.
- It would cost more money to reopen Dalwhinnie.
- Re-opening Dalwhinnie would be a waste of money.
- More pupils means more friends.
- The paint is coming off the walls of Dalwhinnie Primary.
- It would be the best thing for Dalwhinnie.
- There is no-one in Dalwhinnie.

5.5 The arguments put forward by pupils who supported keeping the school mothballed are summarised below together with the responses from the Council. Individual issues raised that are similar to one another have been “grouped.”

#### **Issue 1**

Whilst there are not enough pupils to re-open Dalwhinnie at the moment, the village might get more families/children in the future. If we kept the school mothballed and the village did get more children, then they could be offered a school closer to home.

If Dalwhinnie re-opened now it would just have to shut again, but it could be re-opened when there are at least 10 pupils for the school.

#### **Response 1**

In drawing up its original proposals, the Council calculated estimates of the future roll, taking into account the number of pupils currently within the catchment, the local birth rate, and potential housebuilding. As set out in Section 4 of the Proposal Paper, projections indicate that if Dalwhinnie

Primary were re-opened, it would be as a single teacher school with a very small roll.

### **Issue 2**

There is more chance of an accident because children have to travel by road to get to school.

### **Response 2**

All Highland Council school transport contractors must meet set contractual standards, which include rigorous safety standards. Highland school transport operators have an excellent safety record.

It may be that children from Dalwhinnie are taken to school by their own parents, under contract to Highland Council. It is to be expected that parents transporting their own children will exercise appropriate care in doing so.

### **Issue 3**

If the school is closed the teachers would have to find a new job.

### **Response 3**

As Dalwhinnie Primary is already mothballed, there would no impact on current employment.

### **Issue 4**

Pupils should be able to choose which school to go to.

### **Response 4**

Highland Council places all its communities within designated school catchments. Pupils enrol into the designated school for their home address, at both primary and secondary level. This system is necessary for the efficient planning of educational provision. If parents choose another school, then this must be by means of what we term a placing request. These are normally granted but can be refused where acceptance of the request would result in additional expenditure. Transport is not provided for children attending a school other than their catchment school.

Highland Council will apply the same principles to pupils from the Dalwhinnie, Gergask, and Newtonmore catchments as to other schools in Highland.

### **Issue 5**

We should take more time to think about closing Dalwhinnie. It should not be shut or re-opened at present, but given more time.

**Response 5**

Dalwhinnie Primary has been mothballed since the end of the 2011-12 session, since when there has been no significant rise in the potential pupil population. The Proposal Paper set out the demographic projections for the catchment area, and concluded there was no realistic prospect of a significant increase to the number of children in the foreseeable future. This view has been supported by parents from Dalwhinnie itself.

- 5.6 The arguments put forward by pupils who supported re-opening the school are summarised below. Individual issues raised that are similar to one another have been “grouped.”

**Issue 6**

Dalwhinnie should have a school, and people in the village would not like it to be closed. Every school should have a chance.

**Response 6**

The low population density of Highland means that schools cannot be located in every community. The proposal is being advanced on the basis of educational benefit for children in Dalwhinnie, and the response to the consultation exercise would suggest the proposal has the support of the community.

**Issue 7**

Pupils in Dalwhinnie would miss their friends and miss their school.

**Response 7**

As Dalwhinnie Primary has been mothballed since 2012, the children have adjusted to attending either Newtonmore Primary or Gergask Primary. Re-opening Dalwhinnie might actually cause them to miss the friends they have made in the other two schools.

**Issue 8**

It would be a waste of money to close Dalwhinnie School.

**Response 8**

The Highland Council has analysed the financial impact of the proposal. That analysis (Appendix I to the original Proposal Paper) suggested that re-opening Dalwhinnie Primary would result in an additional cost to the taxpayer of just under £77,000 per year.

**Issue 9**

If Dalwhinnie re-opened, the pupils would not have so far to travel to school. In the winter it is dangerous to travel from Dalwhinnie to either Newtonmore or Gergask.

#### **Response 9**

The original Proposal Paper acknowledged that the main adverse effect for children is the length of journey from Dalwhinnie to either Gergask or Newtonmore, details of which were provided. However, as the school has been mothballed since 2012, all the current pupils are already making these journeys. The journey times involved are not lengthy in comparison to those faced by many other primary and nursery age children in Highland. Whilst the potential impact of winter weather cannot be ignored, these adverse effects must be set against the educational benefits that the proposal could deliver.

#### **Issue 10**

If Dalwhinnie closes then some families may not want to move to the village, because Newtonmore and Gergask might be too far for them, especially if they didn't have a car.

#### **Response 10**

The population living in the Dalwhinnie 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. Additionally, the Report of the Scottish Government's Commission on Rural Education, published in 2013, found a number of examples of communities which continued to depopulate despite the presence of a school. The Commission's review of the scientific and other literature on school closures found there was a lack of robust evidence on how pre-school, childcare and school proximity (and freedom from threat of closure) links to the sustainability of communities.

Any child living in the Dalwhinnie catchment would qualify for funded school transport to whichever school was designated for the area in future.

#### **Issue 11**

If families moved to Dalwhinnie and the school closed, then the families might have to move again.

#### **Response 11**

This scenario will not arise because Dalwhinnie School is already mothballed.



**Issue 12**

Why was Dalwhinnie Primary closed in the first place?

**Response 12**

The school was mothballed for educational reasons in 2012, when the pupil roll fell to 2.

- 5.7 Pupils were also asked which school they thought the Dalwhinnie children should attend (Newtonmore or Gergask), in the event that Dalwhinnie Primary was closed.
- 5.8 Of the 71 pupil responses, 41 thought the Dalwhinnie children should come to Newtonmore Primary in the event of Dalwhinnie closing, whilst 29 thought pupils should go to Gergask Primary. One pupil responded by saying that pupils from Dalwhinnie should be able to choose either school. (This had not been offered as an option, but he or she recorded it as their view anyway).
- 5.9 All 7 of the Gergask pupils who responded voted for Gergask to be the receiving school. The 64 responses from Newtonmore comprised 41 votes for Newtonmore, 22 for Gergask, and the 1 who opted for pupils to have a choice.
- 5.10 The arguments put forward by the Gergask pupils, as to why pupils from Dalwhinnie should attend their school, are summarised below, with the Council's responses:

**Issue 13**

Gergask needs more pupils.

**Response 13**

Highland Council agrees that Gergask Primary could benefit from gaining more pupils. However, the proposal has been drawn up on the basis of maximising the educational benefit to the pupils currently at Dalwhinnie, rather than the potential benefit to Gergask School.

**Issue 14**

Gergask has after-school clubs and great facilities. It is an eco-friendly school. The pupils would welcome the Dalwhinnie children and would be good friends to them. There is no fighting or arguing between the children at Gergask and the children are all well-behaved. Gergask pupils make regular trips to Kingussie Primary so can make more friends there. There are also great school trips. All the parents at Gergask come to help out. Gergask is a great school with great teachers.

**Response 14**

Highland Council is clear that there would be educational benefits for the Dalwhinnie pupils in attending either Gergask or Newtonmore Primary Schools. However, the Proposal Paper set out the case that the larger pupil numbers at Newtonmore Primary offer more opportunities for pupils to be part of age appropriate peer groups.

- 5.11 The summarised arguments put forward by those Newtonmore pupils who supported reassigning the Dalwhinnie catchment to Gergask, were as follows:

**Issue 15**

Newtonmore already has a lot of pupils, and Gergask needs more.

**Response 15**

See response 13.

**Issue 16**

Gergask is closer to Dalwhinnie than Newtonmore, and requires less driving.

**Response 16**

The Proposal Paper acknowledged that Gergask Primary is around 8 miles from Dalwhinnie Primary, whilst Newtonmore Primary is approximately 11 miles away. The difference in distance between the options is not considered significant. The population in Dalwhinnie is adjusted to the need to travel to Newtonmore to access local services.

- 5.12 The summarised arguments put forward by those Newtonmore pupils who supported reassigning the Dalwhinnie catchment to their own school, were as follows:

**Issue 17**

The Dalwhinnie pupils could make many more new friends if they came to Newtonmore. Newtonmore is a happy school, and a better school than Gergask. There are too few pupils in Gergask, and the number is still going down.

**Response 17**

See Response 14.

**Issue 18**

Newtonmore Primary rarely closes in bad weather.

**Response 18**

The Proposal paper identified that neither Gergask nor Newtonmore schools are particularly badly affected by weather related closures.

**Issue 19**

The road to from Dalwhinnie to Newtonmore is safer than the road from Dalwhinnie to Laggan, especially in winter.

**Response 19**

The Council has examined accident data for the relevant section of the A9 and for the A889, from the 2012 to the present. A total of 66 accidents were recorded for the A9, compared with 10 for the A889. This information does of course need to be considered in the context of much greater traffic flows on the A9.

**Issue 20**

Gergask is a very small school, and it would be a big shock to go to High School from a school that size.

**Response 20**

This may be true in some cases, but as the pupils from Gergask have also pointed out that they receive frequent opportunities to visit Kingussie Primary for joint activities, so they also have opportunities to mix with larger numbers of children.

- 5.13 There were a total of 7 written responses received from parents and other stakeholders, although only 5 of these raised any substantive issues. None of the written responses in this category opposed the closure of Dalwhinnie. In general the comments made concerned the reassignment of the Dalwhinnie catchment following closure. Four of the five written responses disagreed with the proposal that, following closure, the Dalwhinnie catchment should be reassigned to that of Newtonmore Primary.
- 5.14 As can be seen from **Appendix 2**, no person who attended the public meeting spoke at the meeting to oppose the proposed closure, although there was again debate about the reassignment of the Dalwhinnie catchment. One additional person (i.e. someone who did not also respond in writing) spoke against the proposed reassignment of the catchment to Newtonmore. However two others argued in favour of the proposal that the Dalwhinnie catchment should be reassigned to Newtonmore. One speaker also thought there should be investment in Newtonmore and Gergask schools, as well as in children's play facilities in Dalwhinnie, to compensate the area for the loss of a school.

5.15 The main arguments advanced by respondents who favoured the reassignment of the Dalwhinnie catchment to Gergask are summarised below, together with the Council's response to each:

**Issue 21**

Small schools are capable of providing an excellent education. Historically the education provided at Gergask Primary has been second to none.

**Response 21**

See Response 14.

**Issue 22**

Gergask has an excellent teacher to pupil ratio.

**Response 22**

For the forthcoming school session Gergask Primary is expected to have 12 pupils in a single P1-7 class. Newtonmore Primary is expected to have 4 English Medium and 2 Gàidhlig Medium classes, with a teacher to pupil ratio ranging from 1:14 to 1:24. Both schools have teacher to pupils ratios within guideline figures.

**Issue 23**

Dalwhinnie and Laggan are both rural communities whereas Newtonmore is suburban. Children from Dalwhinnie are more likely to have shared interests with the children from Laggan.

**Response 23**

Clearly Newtonmore is a larger community than either Laggan or Dalwhinnie. However the total population of the Newtonmore datazone, identified in the 2011 census, is 1,094. Taken together with its location in the Badenoch countryside, it is reasonable to describe Newtonmore as a large village in a rural setting, rather than as a suburban community. Nor it is unreasonable to suppose that there are children attending Newtonmore from families in traditional rural occupations.

There may in fact be some benefits in children being able to attend a school where they can mix with other children from a range of social backgrounds.

**Issue 24**

The distance between Dalwhinnie and Laggan is shorter.

**Response 24**

See response 16.

**Issue 25**

Over the next 8-9 years the dualling of the A9 will affect almost the entire length of the route from Dalwhinnie to Newtonmore. This could well double the average journey time.

**Response 25**

The above comment relates to the part of the overall programme of works to upgrade the A9 between Perth and Inverness, expected to be complete by 2025.

The section of the A9 relevant to this proposal is that between Glengarry and Kincaig. The upgrading encompasses 3 projects as follows:

- Project 7 – Glen Garry to Dalwhinnie
- Project 8 - Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore
- Project 9 - Crubenmore to Kincaig

The route for primary school transport between Dalwhinnie and Newtonmore lies partially within both Project 8 and Project 9. These construction projects are likely to be implemented within 2 separate construction periods. The timing of these projects will be subject to the completion of statutory processes through Trunk Road Orders and Compulsory Purchase Orders.

Project 8 (Dalwhinnie to Crubenmore ) - During the upgrade of this section there will be a period of around 24 months when the A9 is expected to be subject to a 40 mph speed restriction to protect the workforce. The length of road that would be covered by the speed restriction is some 9.75 km (6.06 miles). At 40 mph the journey time over this section is in the order of 9 mins. Any increase in journey time in this section will be in the order of 3 minutes. Timings are approximate but provide an order of magnitude.

Project 9 (Crubenmore to Kincaig) - This section of the A9 is likely to be upgraded to dual carriageway over a period of around 30 months but within a different timeframe to Project 8. There is a short length at the southern end of this project which will be within the route of any school transport trip between Dalwhinnie and Newtonmore. This section of road during construction is also likely to be covered by a 40 mph speed restriction to protect the workforce. The length of road that would be covered (between the north end of the Crubenmore dual carriageway and the Newtonmore Junction) is 2.2 km (1.3 miles). At 40 mph the journey time over this section is in the order of 2 mins. Any increase in journey time in this section will be in the order of ½ min. Again timings are approximate but provide an order of magnitude.

The scenario above is considered the most likely for delivery of the A9

upgrade along this particular stretch, but the project is at the design stage and the methodology is subject to change. The contractor may introduce some temporary traffic management over a short period to facilitate construction but if so this is likely to be over a short length and within a short timeframe.

The decision on the future of the Dalwhinnie catchment would be intended as a permanent decision (and once taken it could not be changed without a statutory consultation under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010). In considering the decision, it is therefore important to look at the most appropriate long term arrangement, irrespective of any time limited traffic management arrangements associated with carriageway upgrading.

#### **Issue 26**

The children from Laggan and Dalwhinnie know and socialise with each other.

#### **Response 26**

Currently all but one of the school age children from Dalwhinnie attend Newtonmore Primary, and it is understood the remaining pupil will transfer to that school in August.

#### **Issue 27**

A few extra children could make a significant difference to Gergask School, whilst having minimal impact on Newtonmore. Reassigning the Dalwhinnie catchment to Gergask would help secure the future of Gergask Primary, which has low numbers. This would be in line with the Scottish Government's wish to support rural life and rural communities.

#### **Response 27**

See Response 13.

#### **Issue 28**

It has been suggested that the A889 Dalwhinnie – Laggan road is closed a lot in the winter. This is not so and the A889 is normally only closed when the A9 is also closed.

#### **Response 28**

The suggestion referred to above was not made by Highland Council. As mentioned elsewhere, we see no significant differences between the two schools in terms of weather related travel problems or weather related closures.

**Issue 29**

It is misleading to suggest that Gergask Primary might not provide an appropriate peer group for pupils or a suitable professional network for teachers. The cluster arrangement between Gergask and Kingussie Primaries provides every opportunity for both.

**Response 29**

As mentioned at Response 14 above, Highland Council is clear that there would be educational benefits for the Dalwhinnie pupils in attending either Gergask or Newtonmore Primary Schools. The Council agrees that the cluster arrangements implemented for Gergask and Kingussie have provided more opportunities for staff and pupils at Gergask to work with their respective peers. However, it remains our view that the Proposal Paper set out the case that the larger pupil numbers at Newtonmore Primary offer more opportunities for pupils to be part of age appropriate peer groups.

- 5.16 It was also suggested that the Council should consider splitting the current Dalwhinnie catchment, or offer families in Dalwhinnie a choice of either Gergask or Newtonmore Primaries.

**Issue 30**

It would be sensible for the Council to split the Dalwhinnie catchment following closure, with Dalwhinnie itself being rezoned to Gergask and Cuaich being rezoned to Newtonmore.

**Response 30**

Highland Council recognises this is a thoughtful response that takes local geography into account. However on balance the educational benefit to pupils still supports the argument that the whole Dalwhinnie catchment should be re-allocated to Newtonmore. This also seems to be the firm preference of parents in Dalwhinnie.

**Issue 31**

Parents from the Dalwhinnie catchment should be given the choice of sending their children to either Gergask or Newtonmore

**Response 31**

See Response 4.

- 5.17 The main arguments advanced by respondents who favoured the reassignment of the Dalwhinnie catchment to Newtonmore are summarised below, together with the Council's response to each:

**Issue 32**

There are children from Dalwhinnie who are already attending Newtonmore Primary. It would be very disruptive to those pupils and families if those children had to move to Gergask.

**Response 32**

Highland Council agrees with this view.

**Issue 33**

Parents from Dalwhinnie are more likely to travel to Newtonmore for work or shopping, than they would travel to Laggan. The majority of Dalwhinnie parents would find it more convenient to place their children in Newtonmore.

**Response 33**

The above is an impression and not something for which there is hard evidence, but the impression may nevertheless have some merit.

**6.0 Summary of the issues raised by Education Scotland**

- 6.1 In line with legislative requirements, Education Scotland was invited to submit comments on the Council's proposals. A copy of the report from Education Scotland is appended – **Appendix 4**.
- 6.2 In their report, Education Scotland recognise that the proposal offers the prospect of clear educational benefits to the children affected. Future pupils will have access to almost all of the curriculum in the same school whereas previously, they travelled between their own school and their partnership school, Newtonmore Primary School, for some of their learning. Currently, children from the Dalwhinnie Primary School catchment area attend either Gergask or Newtonmore Primary Schools. Children attending both schools would continue to have a larger group of peers with which to engage, both in and beyond the classroom. There would be continued opportunities to participate in team activities including sports and also music and drama. This would have the potential to contribute positively to children's social and emotional development. Suitable arrangements would continue to be available to support children who need additional help with their learning.
- 6.3 HM Inspectors further note that stakeholders are strongly supportive of the aspect of the proposal to close Dalwhinnie Primary School and Nursery, and that the proposal will also help The Highland Council to address capacity issues in its school estate and secure best value. They additionally comment the Council has given due consideration to reasonable alternatives to closure. HM Inspectors are of the view that a sufficient range of alternatives has been considered and that the council's proposal to close Dalwhinnie Primary School is reasonable and fair.



- 6.4 Several issues were identified for further consideration by the Council. HM Inspectors noted that, whilst there was a consensus about the closure of Dalwhinnie Primary, the parents, staff and children of Gergask Primary were strongly of the view that the Dalwhinnie catchment should be reassigned to that of Gergask. A few parents at Newtonmore Primary were also concerned about pressure on the space available at Newtonmore. HM Inspectors suggested the council will need to ensure that it continues to engage with stakeholders where further consideration and clarification is required, such as the re-assignment of the catchment area, arrangements for travel and the play facilities within the school grounds. They also commented that the Council's final consultation report will need to set out the actions it has taken to address any alleged inaccuracies and omissions notified to it.
- 6.5 The issues raised around the reassignment of catchment in Section 6.4 above are addressed at Responses 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29 and 30 in Section 5 above. The issue of the play facilities in the school grounds is addressed in Section 7 below, whilst omissions and inaccuracies are addressed in Section 8.

## **7.0 Effects on the Community**

- 7.1 Paragraphs 14.1 to 14.4 of the Proposal Paper (**Appendix 1**) sets out the Council's assessment of the effects of closure on the local community. The assessment was not challenged during consultation, although one additional issue was raised, that of investment in play facilities for children in Dalwhinnie.
- 7.2 The Dalwhinnie Primary School playground has a range of play equipment. Should the closure proposal be implemented, the future use of the site would be considered in accordance with the terms of the Council's current asset management policy. Highland Council would be open to the possibility of the entire school and site being taken over by community, who could consider how they wish to use the site, including the play equipment.

## **8.0 Alleged omissions or inaccuracies**

- 8.1 Two alleged inaccuracies were raised in consultation, both in Response 68 (Appendix 3G). It is suggested that paragraph 10.3 of the Proposal Paper was incorrect in stating that only 5 children attended the pre-school nursery in Gergask when there were in fact 7. The figure of 5 was however correct at the time of drafting. Roll figures cannot ever be anything other than a snapshot at a particular point in time. Whilst Highland Council is happy to acknowledge that the nursery roll at Gergask did subsequently rise to 7, the Council does not accept there was an inaccuracy in the original paper. The nursery roll will of course be different again by August 2016. It should be noted that the Proposal Paper gave a figure of 13 for the P1-7 roll at Gergask PS, a figure which dropped to 11 soon after publication.
- 8.2 It is suggested that paragraph 10.4 of the Proposal Paper was also inaccurate, in that it suggested only two pupils had made placing requests to join Gergask

Primary between 2010-11 and 2014-15, whereas the actual figure was eleven, comprising 3 pupils from Dalwhinnie and 8 from Gergask.

- 8.3 The two pupils recorded as placing requests were both from Dalwhinnie. It appears that the third pupil from that community was not classed as a placing request as the child was placed subsequent to the mothballing of Dalwhinnie Primary. As Dalwhinnie Primary was not accepting pupils during this period, the parent was not opting for a school other than the designated school for the address.
- 8.4 The placing request figures quoted came from data supplied by schools and collated centrally with Highland Council. The 8 other children referred to were mostly foster children from a family within the Newtonmore catchment. The family are a well-established part of the Laggan community and it appears the school did not appreciate the children should have been treated as placing request. This was incorrect and Highland Council acknowledges this error. The figure for placing requests into Gergask Primary should have been ten.
- 8.5 The Council has carefully considered the impact of this inaccuracy on the Proposal but has concluded it does not represent a material consideration relevant to the Authority's decision as to implementation of the proposal. The variation on data relating to placing requests does not alter the options for consideration, i.e. it does not introduce a new option, nor fundamentally rule out an existing option. Since the children concerned attended Gergask Primary, they have been included in the past data for enrolments at that school, used to inform future roll projections, and therefore the educational benefit arguments which favour the reassignment of the Dalwhinnie catchment to that of Newtonmore Primary.

## **9.0 Further Review of Alternatives to Closure**

9.1 Throughout the consultation the Council has had special regard to the provision for rural schools within Section 12 of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010. In particular, the Council has had special regard to the following:

- any viable alternative to the closure proposal;

Alternatives to closure were reviewed at Section 2 of the original proposal paper (**Appendix 1**). The consultation exercise did not identify any new alternatives for consideration. Having reconsidered each of the alternatives identified at Section 2 of **Appendix 1**, the Highland Council has concluded that the alternatives to closure would not deliver the educational benefits of the proposal. This view has been endorsed by HM Inspectors. The detailed reasons for the Council's view are set out in Section 11 of **Appendix 1** and in **Appendix 4**.

- the likely effect on the local community in consequence of the proposal (if implemented), with reference in particular to; (a) the sustainability of the

community, (b) the availability of the school's premises and its other facilities for use by the community;

The potential community impact of the proposal was considered at Section 14 of the Proposal and is further considered at Section 7 above. Taking into account the existence of a village hall in Dalwhinnie, the Council's conclusion is that the main potential adverse effect of closure would be the potential loss of play facilities in Dalwhinnie. As mentioned at paragraph 7.2 above, Highland Council would be open to the possibility of the entire school and site being taken over by community, who could consider how they wish to use the site, including the play equipment. Proposals for future use of the school would be subject to the Council's asset management policy.

- the likely effect caused by any different travelling arrangements that may be required in consequence of the proposal (if implemented) with reference in particular to (a) the effect caused by such travelling arrangements including (in particular), (i) that on the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities, (ii) any environmental impact, (b) the travelling arrangements are those to and from the school of (and for) the school's pupils and staff and any other users of the school's facilities.

The impact of the proposal on travel time was considered at Section 5 of the original proposal paper and again at Responses 2 and 9 above. Since Dalwhinnie School has been mothballed since 2012, implementation of the proposal would not require the introduction of any different travelling arrangements for pupils or staff. The travelling arrangements that have applied since 2012 have worked well and overall travel times for all pupils are within the guideline figure adopted by Highland Council for the purposes of reviewing the school estate.

## **10.0 Further Review of Catchment Issues**

- 10.1 The Council has carefully the arguments put forward in favour of re-assigning the Dalwhinnie catchment to that of Gergask Primary School. The issue is covered above at Responses 4, 13, 14, 15, 16, 22, 23, 25, 26, 38, 29 and 30.
- 10.2 Having weighed the arguments, the Council's view remains that reassigning the Dalwhinnie catchment to Newtonmore Primary offers the best opportunities to maximise the educational and community benefits of the proposal. Whilst agreeing that Gergask Primary could benefit from more pupils, the overriding consideration must be the educational benefits arising for children living in Dalwhinnie. In coming to its conclusion, the Council has taken into account the fact that Newtonmore Primary seems to be the preferred option for parents from the Dalwhinnie catchment. In terms of the wider community, people in Dalwhinnie are more likely to work or shop in Newtonmore than in Laggan, and travel there is likely to be more convenient for parents.

## **11.0 Procedure for Call-in by the Scottish Ministers**

- 11.1 As set out in The Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, Highland Council is required to notify the Scottish Ministers of its decision and provide them with a copy of the Proposal Paper and Consultation Report. The Scottish Ministers have an eight-week period from the date of that final decision on 8 September 2016 to decide if they will call-in the proposal. Within the first three weeks of that eight-week period, the Scottish Ministers will take account of any relevant representations made to them by any person. Therefore, anyone who wishes to make representations to the Scottish Ministers can do so until 29 September 2016. The Scottish Ministers will have until 3 November 2016 to take a decision on the call-in of the Closure Proposal.
- 11.2 Anyone wishing to make a representation to the Scottish Ministers requesting them to call-in a local authority decision to close a school is asked to email [schoolclosures@gov.scot](mailto:schoolclosures@gov.scot) or to write to **School Infrastructure Unit, Learning Directorate, The Scottish Government, Area 2A South, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ by 7 January 2015.**
- 11.3 Until the outcome of the eight week call-in process has been notified to Highland Council, it will not proceed to implement the Proposal. If the Scottish Ministers call-in the proposal, it will be referred to a School Closure Review Panel.

## **12.0 Legal issues**

- 12.1 Throughout this statutory consultation Highland Council has complied in full with the requirements of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, as amended.
- 12.2 As provided for in section 1 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, it is the duty of the Council to ensure adequate and efficient provision of school education within Highland, such education to be directed towards the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of children or young persons to their fullest potential (Standards in Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000). As with all Council duties, the Council also has a duty to make arrangements to secure best value, and in securing best value the Council is required to maintain an appropriate balance between, inter alia, the quality of its performance of its functions and the cost to the authority of that performance (Local Government in Scotland Act 2002, section 1). Each of the above, and all other legislative requirements, have been taken into account in the preparation of this Report.

## **13. Financial Implications**

- 13.1 Advice on the financial implications of the proposal was issued with the Proposal Paper and can be found at **Appendix 1K.**

## **14.0 Equality Impact Assessment**

- 14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was issued with the proposal paper and can be found at **Appendix 1L**.

## **15.0 Conclusion**

- 15.1 The consultation process has complied fully with legislative requirements and has provided an opportunity for all parties to identify key issues of concern. These issues have been fully considered and the Council's response detailed in sections 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 above.
- 15.2 Education Scotland staff visited Gergask and Newtonmore Schools to speak to parents, pupils and staff. They also had the opportunity to review in detail the proposal document and all written responses.
- 15.3 The Director of Care and Learning, on reviewing all of the submissions, the note of the meeting, and the Education Scotland report; and having had special regard to alternatives to closure, to the community impact and to the impact of travelling arrangements; concludes that the proposal offers educational benefits and should be implemented without amendment.

## **16 Recommendation**

- 16.1 It is therefore recommended that Highland Council approves the proposal to discontinue education provision at Dalwhinnie Primary School and re-assign its catchment area to that of Newtonmore Primary School.

**Bill Alexander**  
**Director of Care and Learning**  
**28 July 2016**