

1 Invergordon Primary School Parent Councils, 19 June 2013

Attendees:

- Chair: Cllr Maxine Smith
- Sederunt: Martin Finnigan (MF), Frank Newall (FN), Ron MacKenzie (RMcK), Maurice MacIntyre (MMcI), Cllr M Finlayson
- Three reps from each of Park and South Lodge, and one from Kiltearn Community Council

MS: Introduced meeting, introductions

MF: brief background report on progress so far. Noted that we were undertaking this dialogue to check back with communities that we had identified all the reasonable options and were taking into account all relevant factors. Finished with comment that from purely educational perspective, a combined secondary on a site to be identified is the best option.

Attendees were invited to ask questions or make comments.

Comment: A combined school wont work, Invergordon already dying on its feet “resounding no to combined school from pupil consultation”, businesses would suffer.

Response (MS): There is a need to separate business issues from education – other initiatives in hand to stimulate the economy, this is about education not business

Question: Why is combined school better?

Response: Based on consultation with Head Teachers in Highland and corroborated elsewhere in Scotland. Restriction on subjects at all levels in smaller secondary schools, especially higher levels and second modern language and third science. At Head Teacher workshop unanimous view that school of 900+ was optimum and that below this compromises had to be made. Explained that staffing allocation is formula based according to roll.

Question: Is the combined school the preferred option?

Response: On purely educational grounds, the answer is “yes”. Ultimately this is decision for council to make, CalEc make a recommendation to the Director of Education.

Question: What size of school to guarantee to offer everything you wanted?

Response: No school can guarantee to meet every demand for subjects, levels and combinations, but clearly the larger a school is the more choices it can offer.

Question: What about transport costs, safety, safe routes to schools?

Response: Ben Wyvis and Wick were given as examples of preparatory work and measures taken to ensure that safe routes are identified and created, and maximise the potential for walking and cycling. The statutory position for

schools transport provision and importance of consistent application across the Highlands was also explained.

Question: Would a 3-18 campus not provide the economies of scale to widen curriculum choice etc?

Response: It was explained that a 3-18 campus would provide a number of potential benefits e.g. a single location for parents dropping off pupils, children remaining for their full school career at a familiar location, potentially smoother transitions, better range of facilities than primary age pupils would expect on a discreet site, potential sharing of staff between stages (music, PE, pupil support).

However the secondary school roll would remain as it is, the staffing allocation would remain as it is and there would therefore be no potential to increase subject choice or gain any further advantages at the secondary level: the constraints would be as before.

Question: Has a site been selected?

Response: Definitely not

Question: If the Primary School and Secondary School were put together would there be better support for children who were struggling?

Response: The staged approach to support for learning was explained in detail with the acknowledgement that beyond the support guaranteed already a larger school would have a larger staff and therefore more flexibility in terms of staff support.

Question: Is it possible to widen the choice of subjects by working in partnership with other bodies?

Response: Glasgow City Council has engaged with the University of the West of Scotland to assist in the delivery of advanced higher subjects, perhaps some engagement with University of the Highlands and Islands might be possible.

There is the possibility of using on-line approaches, although it was noted that Education Scotland, while recognising that online approaches can bring some benefits, maintain that face to face contact with a teacher remains essential.

It was also noted that teacher numbers in a school are allocated according to a formula approximating to one teacher per seventeen pupils. The example was given of a small secondary school in the Highlands which will lose 2.8 teachers at the start of session 2013/14 which will lead to a further restriction of subject choices for pupils. Referring back to the HT workshop, it was pointed out that the stresses and strains on single-teacher departments (which are common in smaller schools) are significant and the loss (or absence of) of one teacher can mean the loss or discontinuation of that subject. The inverse is equally true in larger schools where multiple teacher departments are common.

Question: It is all very well walking or cycling to school in the summer, but what about the winter?

Response: Refer back to transport policy

Comment: Concerns were raised regarding the social aspect should the two schools come together. Concerns about pupil rivalry, tensions etc.

Response: Experience elsewhere in Scotland should give the communities confidence that any such difficulties among pupils would be very easily overcome. Reference was also made to the new Ben Wyvis primary and to the Maryburgh and Conon Bridge pupils having gelled within hours of the new school opening having, in the lead up to the opening, been working together on creating the new uniform, tartan and various other features of life in the new school.

Comment: More detail is needed about the proposals.

Response: More detail will be forthcoming.

Question: What size would the new schools be?

Response: Current and projected rolls were explained. None of the options would result in a school of an abnormal size.

Question: The Chair asked if anyone wanted things left as they are with just the existing buildings being refurbished

Response: An almost unanimous “No”.

Comment: We can’t wait for Park and South Lodge to come together.

The Chair thanked everyone for attendance and asked all to bear in mind that this is about “our children and grandchildren” and we need to try to be as objective as possible.

2 Invergordon Academy Parent Council 19th June 2013

Attendees:

- The Council representatives were the same as at the Primary representatives’ meeting earlier in the evening
- Five in attendance including a representative from Kiltarn Community Council.

Introduction the same as for Primary School meeting earlier in the evening.

There was an initial discussion about whether Alness Academy could be refurbished or not. It was explained that this option was including for comparison purposes and that we had a cost consultant report that identifies the cost of doing so.

This was followed by a discussion about Advanced Higher Physics not being available at Invergordon Academy because there was no teacher and concern expressed that although on offer at Alness access for the six young people

concerned appeared to be a problem. The Council agreed to look into the matter.

MF showed graph showing the relationship between the school roll and the number of subjects presented.

Comment: The Council had previously promised that if schools chose to go forward with only six subjects per pupil in the upper school, all would be available at Advanced Higher.

Comment: “I lean towards the community school”

Comment: “Cal Ec came up with this option (a combined school) two years ago and it seems that the community as a whole would suffer”.

There was general negativity towards anything other than the ‘status quo’ unless a joint Academy was built in Invergordon,

A discussion about subject choice followed: “We don’t live in an ideal world and we can’t say for sure that every conceivable subject would be available in a larger school, but we know that a second modern language and third science are particularly at risk in smaller schools”.

It isn’t just more capable pupils that suffer because we can’t offer as many Advanced Highers in a smaller school, less able pupils can also suffer because we are not able to offer as wide a range of subjects at other appropriate levels.

Cllr Finlayson: Would there be fewer composite classes in 3-18 campus?

Response: It was explained that in larger PS’s there are likely to be a higher proportion of single year classes, but one can never rule out composites because this would require numbers to fall neatly into year groups which seldom happens.

Question: What community facilities would be in 3-18?

Response: RMcK replied that these are likely to be similar to Wick, which includes a new pool, public library and other community facilities.

Question: What about communities and potential tension between them and difficulties of bringing them together?

Response: Reference was made to many of the amalgamations that had already taken place in other parts of Scotland in which rival communities had been brought together with no apparent difficulty on the part of the young people who had gelled from day one. Some of the adults (parents and teachers) seemed to take longer to become accustomed to the new arrangements. Reference was also made to steps taken at Ben Wyvis PS to bring pupil bodies together (uniform, tartan etc)

Question: Where would a joint school be built?

RMcK: It is increasingly likely that it will be built in one of the towns, but all options still being considered.

Question: What about school transport arrangements?

Answer: RMcK described the processes at Wick and Ben Wyvis. Planning consent would only be given if a properly designed traffic management system were including in the plans. He also explained safe routes to school work was being done elsewhere and the prospect of the council taking over directly with its own vehicles and employees, the running of school transport. It was also noted that the council cannot make exceptions to rule enshrined in law that only those living more than three miles away from the secondary school are entitled to free transport except on the grounds of the safety.

Question: What would 3-18 campus be like?

Answer: This was partly answered in an earlier response. It was explained that a 3-18 campus would provide a number of potential benefits e.g. a single location for parents dropping off pupils, children remaining for their full school career at a familiar location, potentially smoother transitions, better range of facilities than primary age pupils would expect on a discreet site, potential sharing of staff between stages (music, PE, pupil support).

Question: Could an additional option be considered? This would be a combined secondary school with PS alongside, effectively creating a 3-18 campus with the larger secondary school.

Answer: This would be very similar in size to the new Wick High School and could be looked at in detail.

Request: One attendee wanted to see details of Full Time Equivalent staffing that would be in combined school and also the typical subject choice.

RMcK Offered to share Wick High School designs and carry out further work on staffing and subject choice.

The Chair thanked everyone for attendance and undertook to provide additional information when available.

3 Aness Primary Schools Parent Councils, 20th June

Attendees:

Present: Carolyn Wilson (CW) Chair, Martin Rattray (MR), Maxine Smith (MS), Ron MacKenzie (RMcK), Martin Finnigan (MF), Maurice MacIntyre (MMcI), Frank Newall (FN) and 14 parents representing the Aness ASG Primary School parent councils

Welcome and introductions,

MF gave a brief background to the meeting explaining the various options.

CW emphasised that “we are talking about long term future” and that there was a prize to be gained that the community had been pursuing for many years, and the danger that if a battle between the two communities prevented progress then the prize may be lost

Comment: Expansions at Nigg means a lot of people moving into the area.

Response: School roll forecasts take this sort of thing into account including house building plans and energy developments for the future.

Question: What is the timescale for new schools?

RMcK: 2017 would be the earliest possible start of construction.

Comment: Milton of Leys is very new and already needs to be extended. That isn't at all reassuring.

RMcK: Schools are designed, as is Milton of Leys, to be extended quickly and easily as and when necessary.

Question: Why can't we have a staffing ratio to give us all the subjects we want in the two smaller schools?

MMcI: Staffing is formula based on roll, roughly one teacher to 16 or 17 pupils. (models to be worked up and shared)

Question: Do 3-18 campuses work?

MMcI: Yes they work well; many Councils have built them recently. Several advantages were described including 'one stop shop', transition, tracking pupils and early intervention strategies

Question: What will be the design of a 3-18 campus, – will teenagers and infants mix?

RMcK: Reference to Wick design with separate entrances and play areas etc

Martin Rattray: It would be useful to arrange visits and share plans

Question: How will traffic management and H&S aspects be taken forward?

RMcK: In addition to encouraging safe walking and cycling to school, traffic management would be central to planning with separate parking, calming, drop off zones etc.

Comment: At the beginning/end of day roads are littered with cars.

Question: One parent liked the idea of bigger joint secondary school, but asked where would it be? This question was followed by more discussion about transport between the towns.

RMcK: Explained that location has not been settled yet. Also referred to the extensive works done at Maryburgh/Conon to establish safe routes.

CW: The Council recognises that there is great concern about distances to walk and safety of routes.

Comment: It is not feasible to walk/cycle. The Shore Road is dangerous.

RMcK: The Council is making moves towards having its own fleet of coaches, and its own drivers. Would it make a difference if transport were provided?

Answer: Yes

CW: Could benefits of larger academy be listed please?

MMcI: Discussed number of modern languages, third science is necessary for some university courses, multi-level teaching, cited example of an arrangement between Glasgow City Council and University of West of Scotland for some advanced highers,

Question: Why does Alness Academy appear to perform less well than Invergordon Academy?

CW: Both are excellent schools that work hard to meet the needs of all their pupils. However we must remember we are talking about the long-term future.

Question: What will happen to existing buildings?

RMcK: The Council policy is to offer surplus buildings to other council departments, public bodies, or to dispose of them.

Question: Could Alness Academy be refurbished?

Answer: In theory yes, but this would be very disruptive to normal school life and it is in effect extremely unlikely not least since no-one wants it! Needs to be in as a 'do minimum' option for the options appraisal process.

Question: Would there be facilities to help pupils with Additional Support Needs in a 3-18 campus?

RMcK: Yes – reference was made to Bridgend Centre. MMcI talked about creation of “nurture spaces” as distinct from “sin bins”, and the Council attempting to move towards a corporate parenting approach

Question: What about Newmore and Ardrross Primary Schools?

Answer: The position with the progress of the report of Rural Schools Commission was explained.

Question: Are any sites earmarked for the new schools?

RMcK: None earmarked but we prefer for a number of reasons to use site(s) we already own.

Question: There are different policies operating in each school, how would that change?

MMcI: There should be consistency though not necessarily uniformity.

Question: Why consider the primaries?

RMcK: The SSER thrust is to look at the whole area, eg Fort William and Wick, and also to place a high premium on the maintenance of buildings.

Question: What is the timeline for these developments?

RMcK: Money is available for these developments 2017, so in order to use it we need to be ready to go ahead mid 2014 to give three years to design the new schools, procure builders, obtain planning permission etc

CW introduced the Tain question re priority.

Question: Would one building be easier and cheaper to maintain?

Answer: Yes

Question: What does Invergordon want?

Answer: *"They want what they think is best for all the children and what they think is best for their town."*

Comment: "I don't care about the location, just do what's right!"

Question: What is the decision making process?

Response: RMcK explained that CalEc make recommendation to Director of Education. Decision thereafter for the Council regarding what (if anything) to take forward into formal statutory consultation.

RMck: Raised the idea of 3-18 campus in Invergordon that includes both secondary schools together with a single large Alness primary. He then floated idea of transport for many secondary school pupils from Alness to the enlarged 3-18 in Invergordon, on safety grounds and similar consideration being given at the primary stage. There was significant assent for this idea from those in the room, with one voice of dissent

4 Alness Academy Parent Council 20th June 2013

Attendance by Council representatives was the same as at earlier meeting, with five parents in attendance.

The introduction and initial proceedings followed the same pattern.

Question: How would a refurbishment be done during in term time?

Answer: It is not easy and can be very disruptive to the normal operation of the school concerned. It can also take a long time because of the need to keep shuffling parts of the school, and to keep disruption to a minimum during critical period such as exam times. It took seven years to refurbish Lochaber High School, which is much longer than it would have taken to build a replacement.

Question: Where would the big Academy be and how would it affect shops in the town?

MS: We are aware that some shops in the town do benefit from pupil spend. However we are here to discuss what is best for education and decisions will be based on that. Other initiatives are in place to address local economic issues.

Comment: Children should get to study the subjects they want in their own school.

Answer: Responses explained why smaller schools are not able offer as wide a range of subjects and options as larger ones can.

Question: So is 3-18 not going to happen?

RMcK: There are advantages and disadvantages on both sides. The reason we are here is to discuss these. Reference was made to Wick where a 3-18 is being created. He undertook to share information on the developments in Wick.

Question: What would the transport arrangements be for the new school?

RMcK: Rehearsed the issues and answers given at the earlier meeting.

Comment : 3-18 is over-protecting children by having them in same place all the time – “a terrible idea”. Another parent said the opposite, children familiar with place etc.

Question: How will decision be made?

RMcK: Rehearsed the issues and answers given at the earlier meeting

In conclusion, CW asked the attendees: what is ideal scenario? No conclusive answers were given. CW thanked everyone for their attendance.

5 Meeting with Community Councils 25 June 2013

Present: Martin Rattray (chair), Mike Finlayson, Ron McKenzie, Frank Newall + & community councillors.

Martin Rattray welcomed all to the meeting and asked each person to introduce him/herself.

Ron McKenzie then briefly described the SSER process and outlined the three options that were being considered, plus the further suggestion that a 3-18 campus could be considered that included the two secondaries and the primaries in whichever town the campus was built.

Question: Where will be the location of schools under the various options and what will the possible designs of the new schools be like?

Answer: It was stated that Alness Academy would be difficult to refurbish and the options appraisal process was outlined.

Comment: Bigger is not really better and you can't site a combined school in either Invergordon or Alness

RMcK: answered the points as follows:

Location: a preference would clearly be given to land already owned by the Council. Also, transporting pupils to school was an obligation of the Council in certain circumstances.

Design of new schools: there is already underway in Wick the design and build of a 3-18 campus school with capacity for 900 secondary, 340 primary, 120 pre-5 along with a pool, library and enhanced sports facilities.

Martin Rattray agreed that plans could be shared.

Comment: Continuing with two separate secondary schools makes no sense, one larger school makes for a better education with a broader curriculum. Where it is sited is for another day!

Comment: The cost to pupils in lost opportunities is most important.

Ron McKenzie, in answer to a question described the situation at Tain incorporating St Duthus and TRACC and spoke of a facility open to the community 7 days per week and for extended hours.

Various comments were made by community council members regarding a combined secondary school:

- the argument that should win the day should be the educational argument;
- the consultation (formal) should be on one set of proposals, not a series of options;
- one community councillor stated that coming from outside into the area “ I shake my head at having two separate secondary schools so close together”;
- what we want is a good, well resourced, well run school;
- it will be painful initially because people don’t like to lose their own wee bit;
- pupils are being disadvantaged at the moment.

Question: What will the ASN provision be?

Answer (RMcK): There will be provision alongside a presumption of mainstream where possible.

Comment: The nursery at Park was previously a Special Needs Unit.

Comment: One councillor said that she had spoken to three people regarding 3-18 provision, one with experience of working in Special Needs, one in school administration and one teacher. Each of them believed that a 3-18 campus would be a positive development.

Question: Reference was made to the level of placing requests to Newmore and also to Invergordon and it was asked whether the proposal was to close the rural primary schools.

Ron explained the rural school situation and also the effect that placing requests to Milton of Leys are having on the roll at Daviot. He emphasised that it is not possible to predict the placing requests that parents will make in the future.

A community councillor remarked that it would be helpful in any future publication(s) to give any update on the rural schools situation.

Cllr. Finlayson remarked that the size of the population in and around Evanton is an issue.

The Chair thanked everyone for his or her contribution and brought the meeting to a close.