

Report by Education Scotland addressing educational aspects of the proposal by The Highland Council to improve the accommodation at Strontian Primary School. Options include a major upgrade to the present building or relocating Strontian Primary School from its present location to a new build school next to the nursery at Ardnamurchan High School and to retain its separate identity therein.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report from Education Scotland has been prepared by HM Inspectors in accordance with the terms of the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. The purpose of the report is to provide an independent and impartial consideration of The Highland Council's proposal to improve the accommodation at Strontian Primary School. Section 2 of the report sets out brief details of the consultation process. Section 3 of the report sets out HM Inspectors' consideration of the educational aspects of the proposal, including significant views expressed by consultees. Section 4 summarises HM Inspectors' overall view of the proposal. Upon receipt of this report, the Act requires the council to consider it and then prepare its final consultation report. The council's final consultation report should include a copy of this report and must contain an explanation of how, in finalising the proposal, it has reviewed the initial proposal, including a summary of points raised during the consultation process and the council's response to them. The council has to publish its final consultation report three weeks before it takes its final decision. Where a council is proposing to close a school, it needs to follow all legislative obligations set out in the 2010 Act, including notifying Ministers within six working days of making its final decision and explaining to consultees the opportunity they have to make representations to Ministers.

1.2 HM Inspectors considered:

- the likely effects of the proposal for children and young people of Strontian Primary School; any other users; children likely to become pupils within two years of the date of publication of the proposal paper; and other children and young people in the council area;
- any other likely effects of the proposal;
- how the council intends to minimise or avoid any adverse effects that may arise from the proposal; and
- benefits which the council believes will result from implementation of the proposal, and the council's reasons for coming to these beliefs.

1.3 In preparing this report, HM Inspectors undertook the following activities:

- consideration of all relevant documentation provided by the council in relation to the proposal, specifically the educational benefits statement and related consultation documents, written and oral submissions from parents and others; and

- visits to the site of Strontian Primary School, Ardnamurchan High School and the Sunnart Centre, including discussion with relevant consultees.

2. Consultation process

The Highland Council undertook the consultation on its proposals with reference to the *Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010*. During 2012 The Highland Council proposed to undertake work to improve the accommodation at Strontian Primary School. On being notified of the proposed building work Strontian Primary School Parent Council indicated they would welcome discussions on the possibility of relocating to the Ardnamurchan High School campus thus creating a '3-18' campus. These discussions form the basis of the formal consultation exercise. As part of the consultation process a public meeting was held on 9 June 2014. The Highland Council received 15 responses to the consultation. All of these support the proposal to improve the accommodation at Strontian Primary School through relocating Strontian Primary School from its present location to a new build school next to the nursery at Ardnamurchan High School. There were no objections to the proposal. During the course of the consultation, the proposed options for improving the accommodation were amended to take into account the views expressed by stakeholders.

3. Educational aspects of the proposal

3.1. The proposal by The Highland Council to relocate Strontian Primary School from its present location to a new build school next to the nursery at Ardnamurchan High School and to retain its separate identity therein offers significant educational benefits for children. There are a number of significant weaknesses in the building currently used by Strontian Primary School. Within the proposals being considered the option to upgrade the existing school building is not supported by key stakeholders and does not address the significant shortcomings identified. The council's Schools Estate Management Plan rates the existing building as C (poor) for both educational suitability and condition. Current playgrounds are small and do not offer a safe or stimulating area for play. Access for those with restricted mobility within the current Strontian Primary is limited. There is no staff room or space for teachers to prepare lessons. There is a lack of flexible space which could be used for a range of purposes and meet the demands for delivering a 21st century curriculum.

3.2. The proposed new build would be more environmentally friendly and has the potential to provide a high-quality learning environment. It would also provide a range of other improvements, including access to enhanced information and communications technology (ICT). Access to the school building would comply with all relevant legislative requirements. The co-location of the primary school alongside both nursery and secondary provision within a single 3-18 campus has the potential to improve transitions for children moving from nursery to primary and from primary to secondary. Children would benefit from access to a wide range of facilities within Ardnamurchan High School and Sunnart Centre. There is current capacity to accommodate this demand. Playground and outdoor learning opportunities will potentially be improved. Management of the nursery by the headteacher would potentially be improved by having her located on a single rather than split site basis as currently operates. Having access to an increased staff team with a broader

range of skills, offers the potential to provide increased opportunities for children to take part in a wider range of out-of-class activities. The proposal offers staff the opportunity to be part of a local professional learning community.

3.3. Parent Council representatives, staff, children and young people at both Strontian Primary School and Ardnamurchan High School expressed a strong preference for the proposal to relocate the primary school to a new build, stand-alone school at Ardnamurchan High School. Parent Councils and staff felt there was capacity to accommodate such a move. They felt that children and young people would benefit from being co-located on a 3-18 campus in a modern building. They were strongly of the view that the existing Strontian Primary School was not fit for purpose. They felt that co-location with the nursery and high school would offer improved access to a wide range of resources such as the library, ICT, home economics and physical education. The proposed multi-use games area was warmly welcomed by parents as were increased opportunities for children to access improved playground and outdoor learning experiences. Access to improved dining facilities and a much improved dining experience for the children was seen as a major benefit over existing arrangements. Parents who have children attending both nursery and primary school were positive about the prospect of not having to travel between two sites to drop off and collect children should the option to locate the establishments on one campus go ahead. Young people from Ardnamurchan High School thought that the new build, co-location option beside the nursery at Ardnamurchan High School would improve transitions between nursery, primary and secondary.

3.4. While stakeholders support the proposal to improve the accommodation at Strontian Primary School through relocating Strontian Primary School from its present location to a new build school next to the nursery at Ardnamurchan High School, Parent Council representatives and staff expressed frustration about the lack of detail available regarding the proposed design layout and timescale for the development. They were not aware of the most up to date proposal. All Parent Council representatives and staff did not favour a modular building, and were more in favour of an eco-friendly, traditional build approach. They felt this would demonstrate a longer term commitment by the council to primary education in the area. Secure and safe access for children between any proposed new build school and the existing nursery / high school is an area of concern for parents, staff and children. Of particular concern was how children would move between buildings during inclement weather. In finalising its plans the council needs to take on-board the views and suggestions of parents.

3.5. The community benefits from strong, confident and effective community organisations that are active in delivering local services. As part of a recent community appraisal members of the local community identified the need for Strontian Primary School to be upgraded or rebuilt as a key priority. However, Strontian Village Hall is located within the existing primary school and is a popular and well used local facility. It provides a social hub locally. A number of stakeholders including Parent Councils, school staff and members of the Sunnart Community Company raised concerns about future access to a village hall in the event of the school being relocated. The council needs to engage with a range of

community partners to manage their concerns, when considering options about the future operation of Strontian Village Hall.

4. Summary

The council's proposal to relocate Strontian Primary School from its present location to a new build school next to the nursery at Ardnamurchan High School offers significant educational benefits for children through the provision of purpose-built and fit for purpose accommodation. The current accommodation at Strontian Primary School has a number of significant weaknesses. The fabric of the building is deteriorating and access for those with restricted mobility is limited. The council has consulted with a range of stakeholders and is keen to continue to do so. In taking forward the proposal, the council needs to engage parents, staff, children, young people and the wider community in discussions about the finalised design and layout of the new school. The council needs to put in place safe and secure access between the primary school, nursery and high school buildings, including provision for inclement weather. In taking forward the proposal, it also needs to engage with a range of community partners to manage their concerns about the future operation of Strontian Village Hall.

**HM Inspectors
Education Scotland
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