**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

**EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND ADULT SERVICES COMMITTEE**

# The proposal is to discontinue the provision of education at Kinbrace Primary School, dividing its catchment area between those of Helmsdale Primary School and Melvich Primary School.

**EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS STATEMENT**

**THIS IS A PROPOSAL PAPER PREPARED IN TERMS OF THE EDUCATION**

**AUTHORITY’S AGREED 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 Kinbrace Primary School. For the avoidance of doubt, it should be assumed that the related Pre-School provision is included within any reference below to a Primary School. In particular, any reference to Kinbrace Primary School should be taken as a reference to both the primary and nursery classes.
* To divide the catchment area between the catchment areas of Helmsdale Primary School and Melvich Primary School.(Maps of the current catchment areas are at **Appendices A, Ai, and Aii**).
* The proposed changes, if approved, will take place immediately after the conclusion of the statutory process relating to school closures.

**Legislative Background**

* 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 Kinbrace 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 special regard required for rural school closures. The Council has considered the demographic projections for the area and the school roll projections for Kinbrace Primary (see Section 4 below); has given detailed consideration to the viable alternatives to closure (Sections 5 and 6 below); to the effect of closure on the community (Section 17 below) and to the impact of differing travel arrangements on children who are not yet of school age but who live in the Kinbrace catchment (Sections 12 and 19 below). The 4 current pupils within the catchment currently attend Helmsdale Primary.

**Reason for the Proposal**

2.1 This proposal is being advanced for the following reasons:

* No children have attended Kinbrace Primary School since the school was mothballed at the end of session 2012-13;
* 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) and;
* 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**

3.1In 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 Kinbrace 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 Were Kinbrace Primary to be re-opened, it would most likely be under an arrangement where the school was managed as part of a “cluster” with other schools within the ASG. However, alternative management arrangements would not address the wider population issues within the Kinbrace area.

3.5 There has been no significant rise to the school age population of Kinbrace since the school was mothballed in 2013.

3.6 The current proposal follows informal discussions between Highland Council officials; local elected members and local representatives. Informal discussions with the latter were held with Helmsdale Community Council and with parents and residents within the Kinbrace catchment.

3.7 In the event of a school closure being approved, consideration is required on the most appropriate way to re-zone the Kinbrace catchment. Further discussion on this can be found at Section 14 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 Kinbrace Primary School with Current Catchment Area**

4.1 For the 2016-17 school session, there will be four pupils of P1-7 age living within the catchment area of the school, with 1 pupil of nursery age (N3) in August 2016. At present there are no children of pre-nursery age within the catchment (all figures as at May 2016).

4.2 The above figures suggest that, were Kinbrace School to re-open with 100% of catchment pupils attending the school, the P1-7 roll figures for the forthcoming few years would be:

2016-17 - 4

2017-18 - 4

2018-19 - 5

2019-20 - 5

4.3 The population living in the catchment fell by 26% between 2001 and 2011 and the population of the primary catchment differs from the Highland average with only 9% aged 16 to 29 and 22% aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively). Analysis of the age of females living in the area using fertility rates for Sutherland overall suggests that we might expect to see an average of around 0.4 births per year: the recent historic average has been higher than this.

4.4 If Kinbrace Primary were re-opened, it would almost certainly be as a single teacher school with a total roll in single figures. Highland Council considers that these circumstances present significant impediments to learning and teaching, particularly in terms of the requirements of the current curriculum. Further detail is provided at Section 13.

4.5 As previously stated, the school has not been operational since July 2013. No placing requests in or out of Kinbrace Primary School were recorded in the two sessions prior to mothballing (2010-11 and 2011-12).

4.6 If the school were to re-open, the 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 14 and 15 below.

**Re-Opening of Kinbrace Primary School with Expanded Catchment Area**

5.1 The catchment area for Kinbrace PS abuts those of six other schools although the local road links connect directly to only 3 of these – Helmsdale, Melvich, and Altnaharra. All three are themselves rural schools. Helmsdale Primary is expected to have a P1-7 roll of 49 in August 2016, and to experience a declining roll thereafter. The roll at Melvich Primary is projected to be 20 in August 2016, and to see a gentle rise in the longer term. Any expansion of the Kinbrace catchment at the expense of the catchments of these 2 rural schools risks undermining the sustainability of these schools, as well as increasing travel distances for pupils without increasing the roll at Kinbrace to a viable number.

5.2 The roll at Altnaharra Primary is due to fall to 3 in August 2016 and to remain at 2-3 for the foreseeable future. At the present time (May 2016) there are discussions underway with parents about whether the school should be mothballed for session 2016-17.

5.3 A map of the Altnaharra Primary School catchment is at **Appendix C.** Roll projections for Altnaharra, Helmsdale and Melvich Primaries are at **Appendix D - Dii.**

**Continuation of “Mothballing”**

6.1 Although it would be possible to continue with the current “mothballing” arrangement, Highland Council does not consider that that would represent the best option for the taxpayer or the community. “Mothballing” would mean the continuation of the current lack of clarity regarding the future status of the school.

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 A continuation of mothballing would have no impact on the community. Currently the mothballed building is available for use by the community.

**General Background**

7.1 The proposals are advanced within the wider context of demographic change in the area. Between 2001 and 2011 (Census figures) the population of Highland grew by 11% and the population of the Golspie High ASG area grew by 4%. During this period the secondary school roll fell steadily from 393 in 2001 to 260 in 2014. The population of the Golspie ASG area is slightly older than the Highland average with 12% aged 16 to 29 and 14% aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively).

The ageing population in Sutherland results in low birth numbers but the birth rate (the true birth rate measured as births per year per 1,000 women aged X years) tends to be above the Highland average in the Golspie High area.

The birth rate (the true birth rate measured as births per year per 1,000 women aged X years) tends to be close to the Highland average.

7.2 The reference in the above paragraph 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 E.**

**Current Details – Kinbrace Primary School**

8.1 Kinbrace Primary is situated in north-east Sutherland. The catchment area stretches from Forsinard in the north, to Garvault in the west, east to Kildonan Lodge and south west to just before Armine Lodge.

The school has been mothballed since the end of session 2012-13, when the school roll fell to 1, and the sole pupil transferred to Helmsdale Primary School.

The accommodation at Kinbrace consists of a single P1-7 classroom and a nursery room with ancillary accommodation. There is a spacious playground.

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

8.3 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). Kinbrace Primary School is currently rated as “B” for educational suitability of the building and “C” for building condition.

8.4 The number of pupils within the catchment area entitled to free school meals is not broken down to avoid the identification of pupils.

8.5 There has been no HMIe report published since before 2006.

8.6 When the school was last in operation, it was managed as part of a “cluster” arrangement with Helmsdale School. Were the school to re-open with the roll figures indicated, the staffing entitlements, as per the Council’s Devolved School Management policy are as follows;

Associate (Cluster) Head Teacher

Unpromoted Teachers – 1.00 FTE

Clerical Assistant – 16 hours per week

In addition ASN teaching and non-teaching staff would be allocated to the school in accordance with an annual assessment of need.

A Cleaning Operative – HC2 - would also be employed at 6.25 hours per week.

No meals were supplied at or to Kinbrace School, prior to it being mothballed.

8.7 Annual CO₂ emissions from the Kinbrace Primary School building for the year 2013-14 are estimated at 11 tonnes. During 2012-13, the last year the school was operational, equivalent emissions are estimated at 28 tonnes. Closure of the school and disposal of the building could potentially eliminate these emissions, although this depends on the future use of the building.

8.8 Three of the four pupils within the Kinbrace Primary School catchment would receive transport to school, in the event that Kinbrace School re-opened. This would be on a mixture of distance and safety criteria.

**Current Details – Helmsdale Primary**

9.1 Helmsdale Primary School is set in the coastal village of the same name, in East Sutherland. The School consists of 3 classrooms, 1 nursery room, a room used for toddlers, 1 library/ music room, one gym hall, one small meeting room, one medical room, and a staffroom. There is an extensive playground.

9.2 For the 2016-17 school session, the school is expected to have 49 pupils in three classes, a P1-2 with 14 pupils, a P3-4 with 15 pupils, and a P5-7 with 20 pupils. There are expected to be 12 children in the nursery.

9.3 The projected roll suggests the school will experience a falling roll after 2018- 19, reaching a low of 34. Longer term projections suggest a toll of between 30 and 40.

2016-17 - 49

2017-18 - 44

2018-19 - 48

2019-20 - 44

2020-21 - 38

2021-22 - 38

2022-23 - 34

2023-24 - 34

2024-25 - 36

2025-26 - 34

2026-27 - 35

2027-28 - 35

2028-29 - 36

2029-30 - 37

9.4 During the last 5 completed school sessions (2010-11 to 2014-15) there has been one placing request to join Helmsdale Primary, and 3 placing requests to leave.

9.5 The population living in the catchment fell by 1% between 2001 and 2011 and the population of the primary catchment is older than the Highland average with 11% aged 16 to 29 and 12% aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively). Analysis of the age of females living in the area using fertility rates for Sutherland overall suggests that we might expect to see an average of around 4 births per year: the recent historic average has been slightly higher than this.

9.6 The school has a permanent capacity of 100. The projected August 2016 roll of 49 pupils would therefore represent 49% use of capacity.

9.7 Helmsdale Primary is currently assessed as “B” for building Suitability and “C” for building Condition.

9.8 The number entitled to free school meals is not broken down to avoid the identification of pupils.

9.9 The anticipated year group numbers for August 2016, based on current enrolments, are as follows:

*P1 – 4*

*P2 – 10*

*P3 – 5*

*P4 – 10*

*P5 – 9*

*P6 – 3*

*P7 – 8*

9.10 The most recent HMIe report was published in September 2008. A Copy is at **Appendix F**. Follow-up reports are at **Appendices Fi and Fii.**

9.11 The 2016-17 staffing arrangements are as follows:

Head Teacher – 1.00FTE

Unpromoted Teachers – 2.00 FTE

Class Contact Time Teachers – 0.30 FTE

Clerical Assistant/General Auxiliary – 18 hours per week

Playground Supervisor – 6.25 hours per week

Road Crossing Patroller – 11.25 hours per week

In addition, ASN teaching and non-teaching staff are allocated to the school on an annual basis, according to assessed need. The school nursery is staffed with two Early Years Practitioners, who are each employed for 23 hours per week.

The Catering and Cleaning Service employs the following staff at the school;

Cook HC3 27.5 hours per week.

Cleaning Supervisor HC4 – 18.25 hours per week

Cleaning Operative HC1 – 16.00 hours per week.

9.12 Annual CO₂ emissions from the Helmsdale Primary School building are estimated at 90 tonnes. Implementing the closure proposal would not alter this figure.

9.13 There is presently a single school transport route to Helmsdale Primary, carrying 8 pupils, from a 2015-16 roll of 52. Currently therefore, approximately 15% of the pupil population are in receipt of school transport.

9.14 The closure of Kinbrace Primary would not be expected to cause any adverse effects to Helmsdale Primary. Rather it could be argued that closing Kinbrace Primary would to a certain extent help maintain the current school roll at Helmsdale.

**Current Details – Melvich Primary**

10.1 Melvich Primary School is situated in the centre of Melvich Village. The School consists of 2 classrooms, 1 nursery room, a large hall, and a community room.

10.2 For the 2016-17 school session, the school is expected to have 20 pupils in two classes, a P1-4 with 9 pupils, and a P5-7 with 11 pupils. There are expected to be 8 children in the nursery.

10.3 Projections suggest that the school roll will remain fairly steady over the next few years, with a gentle rise in the longer-term.

2016-17 - 20

2017-18 - 19

2018-19 - 19

2019-20 - 18

2020-21 - 19

2021-22 - 22

2022-23 - 23

2023-24 - 23

2024-25 - 24

2025-26 - 22

2026-27 - 23

2027-28 - 24

2028-29 - 24

2029-30 - 25

10.4 During the last 5 completed school sessions (2010-10 to 2014-15) there have been zero placing requests to join Melvich Primary, and 2 placing requests to leave.

10.5 The population living in the catchment fell by 11% between 2001 and 2011 (from 525 to 468) and the population of the primary catchment is older than the Highland average, with 11% aged 16 to 29 and 14 % aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively). Analysis of the age of females living in the area using fertility rates for Sutherland overall suggests that we might expect to see an average of around 3 births per year: the recent historic average has been below this.

10.6 The school has a permanent capacity of 50. The projected August 2016 roll of 20 pupils would therefore represent 40% use of capacity.

10.7 Melvich Primary is currently assessed as “B” for building Suitability and “C” for building Condition.

10.8 There are no P4-7 pupils entitled to free school meals.

10.9 The anticipated year group numbers for August 2016, based on current enrolments, are as follows:

*P1 – 3*

*P2 – 3*

*P3 – 0*

*P4 – 3*

*P5 – 4*

*P6 – 3*

*P7 – 4*

The class structure for 2016-17 is yet to be finalised.

10.10 The most recent HMIe report was published in December 2006. A copy is at **Appendix G,** with follow-up reports at **Appendices Gi and Gii.**

10.11 The 2016-17 staffing arrangements are as follows:

Head Teacher - 1.00FTE

Unpromoted Teachers – 1.00 FTE

Class Contact Time Teachers – 0.20 FTE

Clerical Assistant – 17 hours per week

Janitor/Driver/Cleaner – 37 hours per week

In addition, ASN teaching and non-teaching staff are currently allocated annually to the school, according to assessed levels of need. The school nursery is staffed with two Early Years Practitioners, who are each employed for 23 hours per week.

The Catering and Cleaning Service employs the following staff at the school;

Cook (HC3) 27.5 hours per week.

10.12 Annual CO₂ emissions from the Melvich Primary School building are estimated at 45 tonnes. Implementing the proposal would not alter this figure.

10.13 There is presently a single school transport route to Melvich Primary, carrying 7 pupils. The school has 24 pupils for the current session. Currently therefore, approximately 29% of the pupil population are in receipt of school transport.

10.14 The closure of Kinbrace Primary would not be expected to cause any adverse effects to Melvich Primary. The proposed transfer of Forsinard to the Melvich catchment would not provide any additional pupils at present, but offers at least the prospect of helping to maintain pupil numbers at Melvich, itself a small rural school.

**Current Details – Altnaharra Primary**

11.1 Altnaharra Primary School is a very small school situated within the isolated community of the same name. The School consists of 1 classroom and 1 room used as a nursery when there are nursery age children. At the present time the nursery room is used for art, music and PE as well as for lunches.

11.2 For the 2016-17 school session, the school is projected to have 3 pupils in a single P1-7 class. There are currently no nursery children. As mentioned at paragraph 5.2 above, there are ongoing discussions with parents about “mothballing” the school for session 2016-17.

11.3 Projections suggest the long-term roll will be in the region of 2-3 pupils.

2016-17 - 3

2017-18 - 3

2018-19 - 3

2019-20 - 3

2020-21 - 3

2021-22 - 2

2022-23 - 2

2023-24 - 3

2024-25 - 3

2025-26 - 2

2026-27 - 2

2027-28 - 2

2028-29 - 2

2029-30 - 2

11.4 No placing requests in or out of Altnaharra Primary School have been recorded in the last 5 complete school sessions (from 2009-10 to 2013-14).

11.5 The population living in the catchment fell by 12% between 2001 and 2011 (from 42 to 37) and the population of the primary catchment is slightly older than the Highland average with 15% aged 16 to 29 and 17% aged 30 to 44 (Highland 15% and 19% respectively). Analysis of the age of females living in the area using fertility rates for Sutherland overall suggests that we might expect to see an average of around 0.3 births per year: the recent historic average has been above this.

11.6 The school has a permanent capacity of 25. The August 2016 roll of 3 pupils would therefore represent 12% use of capacity.

11.7 Altnaharra Primary is currently assessed as “B” for building Suitability and “C” for building Condition.

11.8 There are no P4-7 pupils entitled to free school meals.

11.9 The anticipated year group numbers for August 2016, based on current enrolments, are as follows:

*P1 – 1*

*P2 – 0*

*P3 – 1*

*P4 – 0*

*P5 – 1*

*P6 – 0*

*P7 – 0*

11.10 The most recent HMIe report was published in March 2008. A copy is at **Appendix H.**

11.11 The 2015-16 staffing arrangements are as follows:

Head Teacher – 1.00FTE

Unpromoted Teachers – 1.00 FTE

Class Contact Time Teachers – 0.20 FTE

Clerical Assistant/General Auxiliary – 17 hours per week

In addition, ASN teaching and non-teaching staff are allocated annually to the school, according to assessed levels of need.

One cleaning operative is employed at the school at 7.50 hours per week. There is no catering provision at Altnaharra Primary.

11.12 Annual CO₂ emissions from the Altnaharra Primary School building are estimated at 13 tonnes. Implementing this proposal would not alter this figure.

11.13 As of August 2016, no pupils at the school will be in receipt of school transport.

11.14 No adverse effects on Altnaharra Primary are expected to arise from the proposal.

**Farr and Golspie High Schools**

12.1 The proposed transfer of the community of Forsinard to the Melvich PS catchment would also mean that community transfers from the Golspie High School to the Farr High catchment.

12.2 Farr High School is a small secondary school (67 pupils for session 2015-16) located in Bettyhill on the north coast of Sutherland. The school roll is projected to be 72 in 2016-17 but to fall somewhat in the longer term:

2016-17 - 72

2017-18 - 66

2018-19 - 70

2019-20 - 72

2020-21 - 64

2021-22 - 55

2022-23 - 55

2023-24 - 54

2024-25 - 55

2025-26 - 57

2026-27 - 61

2027-28 - 63

2028-29 - 61

2029-30 - 61

12.3 During the last 5 completed school sessions (2009-10 to 2013-14) there have been 16 placing requests to join Farr High School, and 7 placing requests to leave.

12.4 Between 2001 and 2011 (Census figures) the population of Highland grew by 11% and the population of the Farr High ASG area grew by 2%. During this period the school roll rose from 79 (2001) to 95 (2009), but has since fallen to the current 67. The population of the Farr High ASG area is older than the Highland average with 12% aged 16 to 29 and 15% 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) across Sutherland as a whole is the lowest in Highland, and in recent years the birth rate in the Farr ASG area has been slightly higher than we might expect.

12.5 Farr High is rated “C” for building Condition and “C” for building Suitability. Annual CO₂ emissions from the Farr High School building are estimated at 212 tonnes. Implementing this proposal would not alter this figure.

12.6 The latest inspection report was published in November 2009 and a copy is at **Appendix I**.

12.7 The distance and travel time between Forsinard and Farr High School is 28.3 miles/50 minutes.

12.8 Golspie High School has a 2015-16 roll of 260. The school roll is projected to be 235 in session 2016-17 and to continue to fall in the longer term:

2016-17 - 235

2017-18 - 230

2018-19 - 221

2019-20 - 221

2020-21 - 217

2021-22 - 231

2022-23 - 236

2023-24 - 239

2024-25 - 239

2025-26 - 229

2026-27 - 218

2027-28 - 204

2028-29 - 195

2029-30 - 190

12.9 Golspie High is rated “B” for building Suitability and “C” for building Condition. Annual CO₂ emissions from the Golspie High School building are estimated at 377 tonnes. Implementing this proposal would not alter this figure.

12.10 The latest inspection report was published in June 2008. A copy is at **Appendix J**. Follow-up reports published in 2009, 2010, and 2011 are **Appendices Ji- Jiii.**

12.11 During the last 5 completed school sessions (2009-10 to 2014-15) there have been 2 placing request to join Golspie High School, and 54 placing requests to leave.

12.12 The distance and travel time between Forsinard and Golspie High School is 34.4 miles/65 minutes.

**Educational Benefits**

13.1 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.

13.2 With the above aim in mind, Highland Council has adopted the above indicators in reviewing its’ school estate:

1. Pupils should be educated in facilities which are rated at least category B for each of Condition and Suitability.
2. Pupils should be members of an age-appropriate peer group.
3. Pupils should have the opportunity to engage in the widest possible range of activities beyond the core curriculum, including music, sports, drama and art.
4. Pupils with Additional Support Needs should be educated in the most appropriate local setting.
5. 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.
6. School facilities should be of a size appropriate to the delineated area that they serve, paying due regard to demographic trends.
7. School delineated areas should reflect geography, travel routes and population distribution.
8. Safe school transport should be provided and safe traffic management in and around school sites should be implemented.
9. Teachers should be members of a professional learning community comprising at least 3 members located in the same facility.
10. The implications of school location to local communities should be considered.
11. Schools, wherever possible, should be located where there is a recognised village or other built up community.

13.3 It is Highland Council’s view that the pupils from the Kinbrace catchment derive educational benefits from their current attendance at Helmsdale Primary School, and that this would also apply to any pupils who attended Melvich Primary. Formalising the current arrangements would provide a number of such benefits, judged against both the Highland and National criteria set out above, and in particular those at points, 2, 3, 4 and 9.

13.4 Pupils at both Helmsdale and Melvich Primary Schools regularly work in co-operative learning groups of various sizes, sometimes as a whole school group and sometimes in groups of mixed ages and abilities. A roll of 4/5, of varying ages, such as that if Kinbrace 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 also 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.

13.5 Working with others across a wide range of settings is one of the core elements of the school curriculum. This includes planning and carrying out projects in small groups, sharing tasks and responsibilities, and being ready and willing to learn from and with others. Working with others also plays a part in the development of leadership skills, which become increasingly important to pupils as they move through their school years and beyond school education into adulthood.

13.6 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, including team working, leadership and working with others. Such knowledge and understanding and skills acquisition would very much benefit from discussions and dialogue with peers of the same age/stage.

13.7 It is self-evident that a total school roll of 4 or 5 pupils at varying ages 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. 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.

13.8 As with sports, the larger rolls at Helmsdale and Melvich Primaries provide a greater likelihood of pupils benefitting from a wider range of solo and group musical and artistic opportunities. Helmsdale Primary school receives a visiting Art specialist for the P5-7 class, a Strings tutor, and Chanter tutor for P4-7 and a Kodály Voice tutor for P3 & 4. Melvich Primary also receives a visiting art specialist and a Strings tutor. Tutors from the local Fèis visit at weekends during certain times of the year, offering tuition in traditional instruments.

13.9 Larger pupil numbers also provide more opportunities for after school activities. Helmsdale Primary currently runs an after school football club for P3-7 twice a week. Parents hope to start another after school club offering a variety of activities depending on the interests of the children e.g. sports, crafts, homework club, construction, music. Melvich Primary has an after- school club for Scripture Union. Football and rugby are also offered using the grounds of Farr High School, with transport to Bettyhill provided by High Life Highland.

13.10 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.

13.11 School shows, plays and public performances are events that that are much more difficult to deliver with restricted numbers. Helmsdale Primary produces two whole school shows per year, a nativity at Christmas and a show in the summer term, each with two performances. Melvich Primary produces a Christmas Show and has an annual Burns Supper. The school recently participated in the “Rock Challenge” dance/drama event at Eden Court Theatre in Inverness.

13.12 In summary, a number of positive benefits have derived from the operational merger of Kinbrace and Helmsdale Primary Schools, and Melvich Primary would offer similar advantages to any pupils attending that school.

**Catchment Areas**

14.1 All of the pupils within the Kinbrace Primary catchment currently attend Helmsdale Primary. Based on the size, geography, spread of communities, and distance from neighbouring schools, the Council’s proposal is to re-align the catchment of Kinbrace split between the Melvich and Helmsdale catchments.  In doing so, giving consideration to relative travel distances and times of the various communities within the current Kinbrace catchment.

14.2 The distance and travel time from Kinbrace Primary to Helmsdale Primary is 17.1 miles/28 minutes. The distance from Kinbrace Primary to Melvich Primary is 23.2 miles and 38 minutes. In the event that Kinbrace Primary closes, the community of Kinbrace itself should be re-zoned to the Helmsdale catchment.

14.3 The community of Forsinard, at the north end of the Kinbrace catchment, is however closer to Melvich (16 miles/28 minutes as compared with 24.8 miles/47 minutes to Helmsdale). It seems clear therefore, that if Kinbrace Primary closes, Forsinard should be re-zoned to the Melvich Primary School catchment. This would mean that secondary school pupils from Forsinard would attend Farr High School.

14.3 In order to implement the above, the southern boundary of the redrawn Melvich PS catchment would mirror the southern boundary of the Melvich Community Council area.

14.4 An alternative proposal would be to draw the southern boundary of the Melvich catchment along the railway line, to the point where it meets the community council boundary.

14.4 Badanloch, towards the west of the Kinbrace catchment, is roughly equidistant between Helmsdale (21.7 miles, 38 minutes) and Altnaharra (23.2 miles, 39 minutes, whilst Garvault, at the far west of the catchment, is around 8 minutes closer to Altnaharra.

14.5 The school roll at Altnaharra Primary is lower than that of Helmsdale Primary and for that reason the school may be mothballed during session 2016-17. Taking all relevant factors into account, Highland Council does not consider that any part of the Kinbrace catchment should be transferred into the Altnaharra catchment.

14.6 On balance therefore, the Highland Council would favour including Badanloch and Garvault in the Helmsdale catchment.

14.7 A map of the proposed new catchments is at **Appendix K**.

14.8 The proposed split of the catchment would have no effect on current pupils within the catchment.

**Effects on School Transport**

15.1 Currently, a single transport route operates to Helmsdale Primary, taking a total of 8 pupils, including 2 from the current Kinbrace catchment. The route is combined with transport from Loth to Helmsdale. Based on current prices and 190 days in the school year, the annual cost is £26,169.

15.2 Were Kinbrace School to re-open, the annual cost of the reduced transport to Helmsdale Primary is estimated at £11,400, a saving of £14,769.

15.3 As mentioned at paragraph 8.8 above, transport would need to be arranged for Kinbrace Primary, were it to re-open. It is very difficult to estimate what the costs would be, but on the basis that pupils would be travelling to Kinbrace from both east and west of the school, combined with the lack of a local contractor, the annual costs may be very similar to the current transport costs for the Badanloch to Helmsdale route, around £25000 per year.

15.4 Unusually therefore, our best estimate is that the re-opening of Kinbrace Primary would lead to increased overall transport costs, with the saving on the Helmsdale route being more than offset by the cost of providing transport to Kinbrace Primary. The particular local factors influencing this are that the current single route to Helmsdale would be replaced by separate routes to Helmsdale and Kinbrace, requiring an additional vehicle and additional driver, and that the lack of a contractor based in Kinbrace means that the contractor’s overall mileage would not decrease.

15.5 The table at **Appendix L** illustrates the additional emissions of greenhouse gases arising from the current transport arrangements from Kinbrace Primary to Helmsdale Primary. The figures are based on the type of vehicle used and the fuel used by that vehicle.

15.6 The table shows that the transport from Kinbrace to Helmsdale Primary generates about three quarters of a tonne 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.

15.7 The additional emissions set out above must be set against the estimated 11 tonnes of emissions from the mothballed building, and the estimated 28 tonnes annually from a re-opened school.

15.8 During the current school session transport from Kinbrace to Helmsdale has operated every day without disruption.

**Effects on Staff and School Management Arrangements**

16.1 Kinbrace Primary and Helmsdale Primary schools have, in practice, operated as a single school since Kinbrace was “mothballed” in 2013. There will be no impact on staff and school management arrangements from a formal closure of Kinbrace Primary School.

* 1. A continuation of the current mothballing arrangement will have no effect on current staffing arrangements at Helmsdale Primary.
  2. There are no staffing implications at present for Melvich Primary, as here are no resident pupils within the planned re-zoned catchment.  Staffing implications for Melvich be considered in future if there were to be pupils in the Forsinard community.

16.4 The staffing implications of re-opening Kinbrace Primary School are set out at Paragraph 8.6 above, whilst the financial implications are set out at Section 18 below, together with the associated Appendix.

**Effect on the Local Community**

17.1 There is a village hall in Kinbrace, which provides a public space for the community in the event of the school building being closed and disposed of. The Hall is small in size and does not open during the October-March period.

17.2 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 the current school building could be turned over to community use. Any such proposal would be progressed within the terms of the Council’s current asset management policy.

17.3 Paragraph 4.6 above explains that the population of the catchment fell by 26% 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**

18.1 The Table at **Appendix M** sets out the Highland Council’s assessment of the Financial Implications of the proposed merger.

**Equalities Impact Assessment**

19.1 A preliminary EQIA assessment is at **Appendix N.**

**Rural Impact Assessment**

20.1 A preliminary Rural Impact Assessment is at **Appendix O**.

**Mitigation of Adverse Effects**

21.1 The main adverse effect for children in the P1-7 age group is the length of journey from the Kinbrace catchment to Helmsdale, details of which are provided above. However, as the school has been mothballed since 2013, the four current pupils are already making this journey. The population in this area is accustomed to making long journeys to access things that people in urban areas take for granted.

21.2 Funded school transport will be provided to P1-7 pupils from Kinbrace attending whichever school catchment their home address is re-assigned to.

21.3 Although funded transport is not provided for nursery age children, these children have already been attending either Helmsdale Primary for their pre-school education.

21.4 In overall terms, the adverse effects arising from the additional travelling time for pupils must be balanced against the educational benefits that will arise for pupils set out at section 11 above.

**Recommendation**

22.1 Taking the above into account Highland Council recommends that the Kinbrace Primary School, currently “mothballed,” is closed and the catchment area re-assigned to that of Helmsdale Primary, with the exception of the community of Forsinard, which will become part of the Melvich Primary School catchment as set out at paragraph 14.3 above.

22.2 This consultation 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***.***